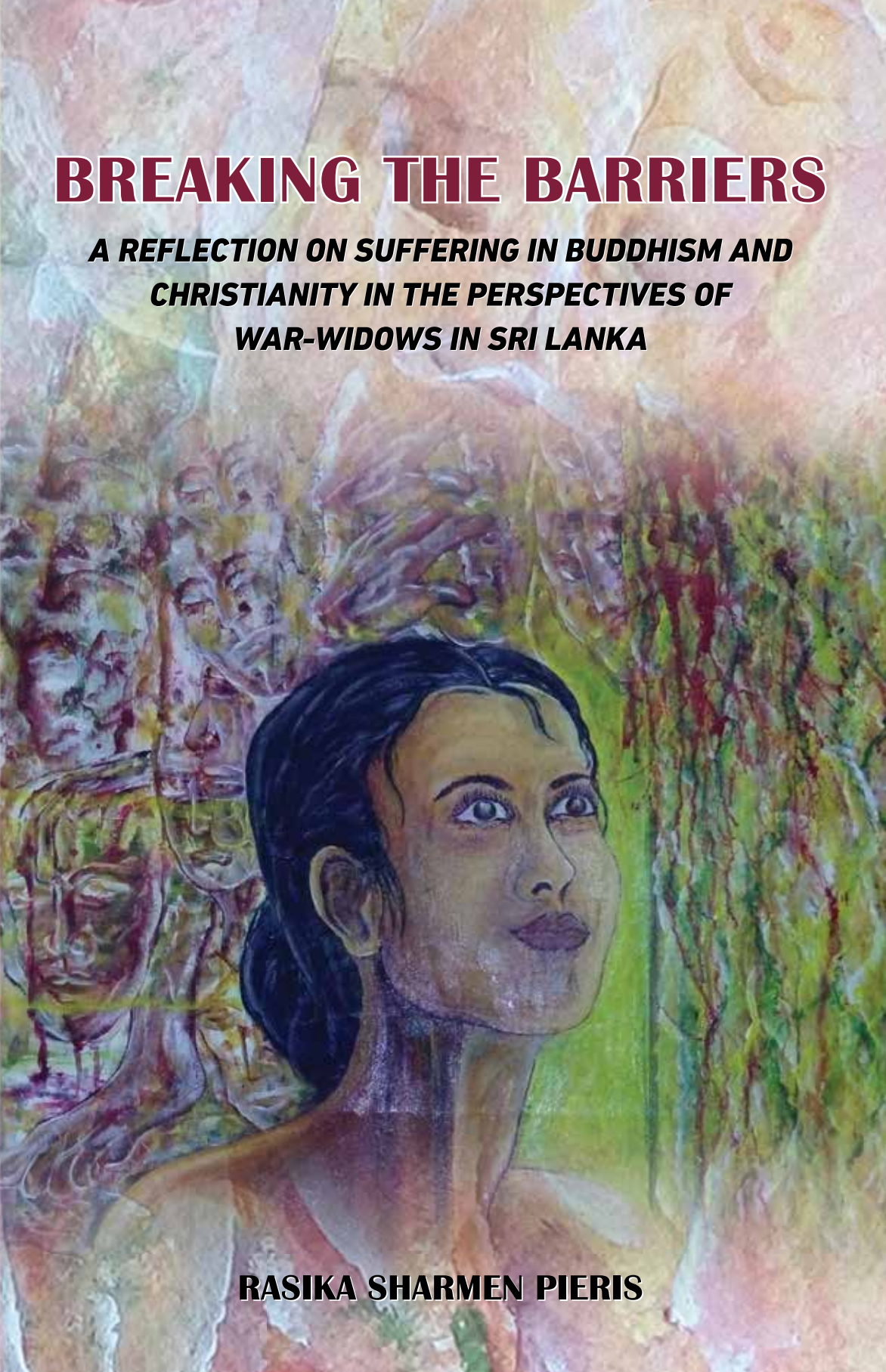
BREAKING THE BARRIERS

A REFLECTION ON SUFFERING IN BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE PERSPECTIVES OF WAR-WIDOWS IN SRI LANKA



RASIKA SHARMEN PIERIS

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Doctoral Thesis

to obtain the degree of doctor
from Radboud University Nijmegen
on the authority of the Rector Magnificus prof. dr. J.H.J.M. van Krieken,
according to the decision of the Council of Deans
to be defended in public on Tuesday, December 19, 2017
at 10.30 hours

by

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Dedication

to women widowed by war
anguished and agonised by
inter-ethnic violence
I, humbly and gratefully dedicate
this academic discourse
which teems
with their tales of woe
and reveals
their indomitable courage
before daunting inhumanity

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part Three
THE IMPARATIVE VENTURES

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ABBREVIATIONS

BBS	*Bodu Bala Sena* (Buddhist Power Force)
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
EU	European Union
FP	Federal Party
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOSL	Investigation on Sri Lanka
JVP	*Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (People's Liberation Front)
LLRC	Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelaam
MP	Member of Parliament
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
SL	Sri Lanka
TID	Terrorist Investigations Divisions
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
TNPF	Tamil National People's Front
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNP	United National Party
USA	United States of America
VOC	Vereenidge Oost- Indische Campagnie
WB	World Bank

INTRODUCTION

Since women's experience is always shaped by a complex interaction of factors... a woman's viewpoint will always reflect her situation and perspective. The emphasis on the historical character of knowledge and human experience offers more room for feminist theologians to dialogue across differences and for multiply oppressed women to articulate diverse theological voices.[1]

Context of the Thesis

Sri Lanka (SL) is a country that is known for its richness of natural resources and beauty. It is one of the few countries with a vast and rich cultural diversity, different languages and religions. Yet it is also a profoundly polarised country: a rich country with poor citizens, deeply spiritual but breeding communal and religious violence, preaching love and non-violence, yet subjugating and violating the dignity of women.

SL is a country in transition that is recovering from the brutal ethno-national war between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelaam (LTTE). This war ended in 2009 without a political solution to the ethnic conflict between the Tamils and Sinhalese. The country now finds itself in a post-war or post-conflict situation in which the women who bear the scars of the war still search for truth and justice. The three decades of war (1989-2009) have had a major impact on this country that saw tens of thousands of people killed, many displaced, injured and disappeared, mostly Tamils in the North and the East. There are thousands of Hindu, Christian, Islam and Buddhist war-widows among Tamil, Muslim, Sinhala and Burgher ethnicities – especially among the Tamils – who receive little assistance from the government. Both Sinhala and Tamil war-widows are culturally, socially and religiously marginalised in their own communities due to the existing customs, norms and also some religious teachings on widowhood/womanhood.

Being myself a woman, I was struck by the vulnerability of the women struggling for their dignity and liberation in the midst of suffering and oppression. Women from different sectors, such as the war-widows,

1 Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 39.

women in the Free Trade Zone (FTZ), women in the plantation sector, women in fishing areas and women living in the slums and prisons, are suffering because of the inequality in various spheres. I observed in most of these women an enormous potential and the capacity to struggle for their full humanity: their resistance to suffering and hope in the midst of suffering. It challenges me to re-vision the potential of women who have the power to transform society so that everyone can live as 'people' with the political right to live in this country.

In retrospect, I was especially challenged by the lived experiences of the war-widows. I came in contact with in the *Menik* farm, the biggest refugee camp where almost 3,30,000 Tamils were interned after the end of war between the GoSL and the LTTE. My first impression of seeing Tamils – especially war-widows under the control of armed forces, in refugee camps surrounded by barbed wire, and living without a minimum of basic human needs – was how the sacredness of life had been diminished by the dominant forces in the country. Some groups of Sinhala women who lost their husbands during the war; the soldiers of the armed forces and people affected by the war – made me reflect on the reality of widows in the context of SL. I saw widows among them whose perception of their suffering differed from many other war-affected people, because of how they resisted suffering and the way they dealt with their marginalisation and oppression with hope. This made me think about the potential of widows to transform their suffering and the suffering of their own communities.

My first visit to 'Mullivaikkal', a village on the North-Eastern coast of SL, where thousands of Tamils were massacred during the last phase of the war, was a transforming experience. I saw the desolation and the despondency that enveloped their lives: a dismal picture of dilapidated houses, scattered pieces of furniture, children's books, and broken toys that littered the ground. There was bewilderment on the faces of the people as they stared at me, a Sinhalese … unbearably hostile and alien. I felt a sense of discomfort and uneasiness as I looked at the people who passed by and saw their pain and frustration.

During my stay in the war-devastated village, a group of war-widows invited me to attend their weekly meeting. The group consisted of Hindu and Christian women: women from high caste as well as low caste,

educated or uneducated. It was significant that two Sinhala women were present from the South. The words of the leader of the association still reverberate in my ears as signs of hope born out of suffering:

> We are marginalised and oppressed by the society and dominated by different groups of people due to our womanhood, widowhood, ethnicity and socio-political status. Yet, do not forget that we are women. We are women who have faced the utmost challenges in the past and even now we suffer in our struggle for our liberation. We have power to assert ourselves and stand for our dignity, overcoming barriers which make us unjustly suffer in society. Our power is our hope.

The war-widows, whom I met during the past few years, form a prominent group that struggles for full humanity in the midst of cultural, social, political and religious marginalisation. Their resistance to the oppression in the midst of suffering radiates the power for liberation. All of this raised such questions as:

- What insights do they generate in my theological reflection as a woman?
- How do religions support them to overcome their suffering or do religions make these women victims through the religious customs, rituals and teachings?
- Is there any connection between the perception of widows in society and the teachings of religions in SL?
- How does the reflection on the experiences of the women who resist their suffering challenge the existing theologies in SL?
- Do the existing theologies in SL become a premise for these women to promote their dignity and freedom as women within Sri Lankan society that is patriarchal and hence discriminates women because of their gender, ethnicity, class and social status?

Living in the midst of war-widows who constantly inspire me through their struggle for liberation impelled me to investigate their power of resistance.

The Relevance of the Thesis

Several scholars have already carried out research on war-widows in SL. They have mainly focused on the multifaceted oppression of

female heads of households, especially war-widows in socio-economic structures. The significance of the present research is that it is based on voices of unheard Buddhist and Christian war-widows of both Tamil and Sinhala ethnicities from the perspective of suffering related to Buddhist and Christian notions on suffering. The main focus will be their own perception of suffering and the ways they resist their suffering in Buddhist and Christian religious thinking. This is a lacuna which this thesis tries to remedy.

The Main Aim and the Main Research Question

Social structures are expected to assist people in their struggle of overcoming suffering whereas they do in fact become a roadblock to full humanity. Strengthened by faith, values and life giving dreams, the war-widows are on a journey towards a society where everyone is equally accepted and respected as a human person who can live with self-determination, no matter what the religion or ethnicity or any other social status they may belong to.

As mentioned earlier, the present thesis focuses on the perception of Tamil and Sinhala war-widows of suffering related to Buddhist and Christian religious thinking. The primary purpose of the present thesis is to study the war-widows' resistance to their suffering within the man-made cultural, religious and social barriers. The thesis emphasises that war-widows are not mere victims who suffer within an oppressive system, but they are also social agents with the authority to transform unjust social structures, through their ways of being and resistance.

The process requires moving beyond the barriers of ethnicity, religion, caste, class and gender that polarise the war-widows living in different social, cultural, religious, political and economic structures. This is a radical decision that leads to a way of life where war-widows become the focal point, the centre and principle agent in their journey towards liberation. Therefore, this study emphasises how the Buddhist and Christian war-widows in SL became an authoritative voice in the existing theologies through their struggle for full humanity.

The resistance of women to oppressive structures that marginalise them have a long history in SL. The well-known *Gajamannona* – the legendary Sinhala poetess of the eighteenth century – is a prominent

example. *Gajamannona* learned the Sinhala language from a Buddhist monk by breaking the tradition that frowned upon women sitting alone at a monk's feet. It was unusual at that time, yet she acted as an emancipated woman.[2] A Tamil journalist named Mangalammal Masilamany (1884-1971) at the age of eighteen started a women's group called *Penkal Seva Sangam* – an association to serve women in order to impart new knowledge and self-confidence. She mentions, "[W]ithout struggle we [women] can have no rights for women."[3]

Many war-widows are crossing the barriers created by the oppressive hegemonies in this country despite the fact that the path is blocked. Most often their crossing of the barriers is dangerous and amounts to a 'death experience' in their lives, yet they continue their struggle for full humanity through resistance as a new way of dealing with their oppression.

In order to address the aim/hypothesis of the thesis, the main research question will be:

How do the Buddhist and Christian war-widows of Tamil and Sinhala ethnicities perceive and deal with their marginalisation, oppression and suffering in relation to Buddhist and Christian notions regarding suffering?

For this purpose, a critical analysis of the living experience of Buddhist and Christian war-widows in SL and the study of suffering in Christian theological and the Buddhist philosophical thinking will be essential. Through examining new elements in the way war-widows raise the issue of suffering, and comparing this to the theories presented in Buddhist and Christian religious thinking, the thesis will in the end explore the contribution made by the war-widows in relation to the critical approach of liberation theology as well as transformation in SL. The following sub-questions will be of major importance in reaching the main goal of the thesis:

1. What is the official teaching on suffering in Christian theological thinking?

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2 A.C.B. Pethiyagoda, "Sri Lanka's Legendary Poets": http://www.island.lk/2005/07/03/features6.html (accessed 25 November 2013).

3 Mangalammal Masilamany, "Hindu Organ," quoted by Selvy Thiruchandran, *Women's Movement in Sri Lanka: History, Trends and Trajectories* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2012), 20.

2. What is the official teaching on suffering in Buddhist philosophical thinking?
3. What is the view of liberation theologians and engaged Buddhist thinkers on suffering?
4. What is the view of Christian feminist theologians and Buddhist feminist thinkers on suffering?
5. What is the impact of the main ideas and theories of suffering in Buddhist and Christian religious thinking on war-widows?
6. What are the new elements of suffering that the war-widows speak about, compared to the theories presented in Buddhist and Christian religious thinking?
7. What kind of contribution do war-widows make to the existing theology and Buddhist philosophy in SL?

Methodology of Working

The present research, both along theoretical and empirical lines, will attempt to discover the theological possibilities, challenges and relevance of the survival strategies of Buddhist and Christian war-widows by critically describing, analysing, interpreting and inter-relating their situation and relating these findings to existing systematic theological concepts. The research is partly theoretical as it is based on readings and analyses of the historical context and the cultural perception of widows in SL, and on literature concerning suffering in official religious thinking in Buddhism and Christianity, Catholic liberation theologians and a Protestant theologian/engaged Buddhist thinkers, and Christian feminist theologians/ Buddhist feminist thinkers.

The research is also empirical in that it includes fieldwork done with a selected group of Buddhist and Christian war-widows – Tamil Christian, Sinhala Christian and Sinhala Buddhist – in a post-war context in SL. The women come from different social, religious, political, cultural, economic and educational backgrounds in some selected provinces. The qualitative research approach is conducted by way of in-depth interviews. The theological research is partly based on interviews, in dialogue with unheard voices, and a critical analysis of the daily experiences of widows, which helps to reflect on the notion of suffering in Buddhist and Christian thinking in different ways and its influence on the perception of widows and their suffering.

Set up of the Work and Presentation of the Chapters

The thesis consists of three main parts. Part I, entitled 'The Panorama', is the landscape from which the critical theological reflection on the experience of war-widows in SL who struggle for their liberation begins. The first chapter: 'The Contextualisation of War-Widows in SL', provides evidence that the experience of war-widows is not an isolated phenomenon. The aim of the first part of the first chapter is to discuss the main backdrop of the present thesis, which is based on women who became widows due to the ethno-national war between the GoSL and the LTTE. The second part of the first chapter explores how both the Sinhala and Tamil patriarchal cultures in SL, which are influenced by the Indic heterogeneous socio-cultural phenomenon and the colonial ideology, have an impact on the perception of widows and some exceptional views on widows of the same religious-cultural background.

Having discussed the socio-political, religious and cultural context, and the influence of both the Sinhala and Tamil cultures on the lives of widows, chapter two explores the findings of the fieldwork done among Buddhist and Sinhala war-widows of Tamil and Sinhala ethnicities.

The result of the research leads to the following areas: (1) Factors that made women war-widows and their first reaction to being forced into widowhood; (2) Challenges the war-widows faced after the death of their husbands; (3) Obstacles that war-widows faced in society; (4) Their participation and involvement in support groups in the society; and (5) War-widows' views on religion and God/s. The qualitative method will be made use of to describe, analyse, interpret, and critically engage the experience of war-widows particularly from a feminist theological perspective. The findings of the fieldwork pave the way to investigating whether the religion of war-widows is a restrictive or a supportive element in their daily living activities. This will be discussed in Part II.

Part II, which bears the title 'The Spectators' examines in the chapters three and four, theories and notions of suffering in Christian theological and Buddhist philosophical thinking. Chapter three discusses suffering from the perspective of institutional Christian religious thinking and how that teaching is challenged by two Catholic liberation theologians – Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino – and a Protestant theologian, Jürgen

Moltmann. Next the critical stance of three feminist theologians: Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid, regarding the teachings of the institutional Church and also the views of the liberation theologians on suffering is reviewed.

Following the methodology adopted in the third chapter, the fourth chapter studies suffering in the official teachings of Theravāda Buddhist thinking and offers a critical reflection on suffering in Buddhism from the perspectives of three engaged Buddhist thinkers – Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa, and Bernard Glassman – and from the perspectives of three Buddhist feminist thinkers – *bhikkhuṇī* Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *bhikkhuṇī* Dhammanandā and Rita Mary Gross.

Part III, titled 'The Imperative Ventures' is the central project of the research, which flows from Chapters two, three and four. What does empower a few war-widows to break social, cultural, religious and political barriers and struggle for their freedom in present life? Having discussed the suffering in Christian and Buddhist religious thinking, the research then moves into the most important direction in the fifth chapter, which confronts the three levels of theological/philosophical thinking in Buddhism and Christianity on suffering and the manner in which the war-widows speak about their experience of suffering.

The aim is to reconstruct how the Buddhist and Christian war-widows express their suffering based on their lived experience, and to examine the new elements emerging out of the fieldwork on suffering in comparison with the theories presented in chapters three and four and, finally, to explore the challenging experience of war-widows as a source for reconstructing the existing theologies in SL.

The title of this thesis, "Breaking the barriers: A reflection on suffering in Buddhism and Christianity in the perspectives of war-widows in Sri Lanka", incorporates the powerful struggle of the war-widows for their full humanity and the dignity of each and every person in the Sri Lankan society through their resistance to the suffering in hierarchical structures.

Taking the experiences of war-widows and their reflections as the starting point for deconstructing the theologies that oppressed women for centuries, the aim of the present thesis is to systematically scrutinise the new challenges

and explorations emerging in Christian theologies in SL, through the critical reflection of the lived experiences of Buddhist and Christian war-widows whose way of living and resistance to suffering have become a challenging force to mainstream Buddhist and Christian religious thinking.

Part I

THE PANORAMA

Chapter One

CONTEXTUALISATION OF WAR-WIDOWS IN SRI LANKA

Doing theology is a personal and a political activity .... Our personal stories of agony and joy, struggle and liberation are always connected with our socio-political and religio-cultural contexts. Theology, therefore, is a discourse both intimate and public.[1]

Introduction

Being aware that theology emerges from a particular socio-political and religio-cultural context, the first chapter is devoted to a study of the context of SL, from which my theological exploration begins. First and foremost, the need is felt to acquire the background knowledge in regard to the 'war-widows' of the ethno-national conflict between the GoSL and the LTTE. Hence, this chapter focuses on two main areas: (1) The historical context of SL in which the study of the war-widows will be carried out; and (2) The cultural perception of widows in Sinhala and Tamil communities.

The first part of the chapter is a critical analysis of the social, cultural, religious, economic and political context of SL, which gives an overview of the reality of the country. The aim of this first part is to highlight five important realities that gave rise to ethno-political conflicts in SL: (1) The ethnic and linguistic situation; (2) The religious atmosphere; (3) The economy since independence; (4) The political ambiguity; and (5) The cultural situation in SL. A brief study of these realities will help to make sense of the conflictual aspect of the ethno-nationalism in SL, which has made many women widows throughout the past three decades. The main focus will therefore be the root causes of the ethno-national conflict of this country. Tracing it back to the colonial period, and identifying some of the drastic changes that occurred in the country after independence, will show that in the process of building the post-colonial nation-state, deliberate ignorance of the non-violent approach of the Tamils essentially paved the way to a war between the GoSL and the LTTE.

The second part of the chapter studies the cultural perception of 'widows' in Sinhala and Tamil communities. Being aware of the historical factors, which have been passed from one generation to the next, this section examines the cultural perception of widows in both Tamil and

1 Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 1.

Sinhala communities. This will help explain the prevailing marginalisation of widows in the Sri Lankan context and especially the mythical ideologies that exist about widows in both Sinhala and Tamil communities.

This first chapter presents an overview of the root causes that contributed to the phenomenon of war-widows and the marginalisation of widows in the social, cultural, economic, religious and political spheres in the historical context of SL. The importance of this chapter is that it offers a panorama of the context in which 'war-widows' in SL deal with their suffering and with their marginalised identity as 'war-widows'.

1. An Overview of the Context of SL[2]

SL is an island of 65,610 square kilometres, located twenty nine kilometres off the South-Eastern coast of India. This island is known as the 'Pearl of the Indian Ocean' due to its beauty and its geo-political location on main sea-routes of the Indian Ocean, mainly the Silk Road that connected West and East.[3] As a result, people in the island were familiar with traders, merchants, pilgrims and nomads from different countries such as India, China, Persia, Arabia and some Western countries as well. Hence the island is known by different names such as *Taprobane* by ancient Greek geographers,[4] *Thambapanni* (copper coloured sand) by King Vijaya the legendary father of the Sinhalese, *Serendib* by the Arabs,[5] Ceylon or *Ceilaõ* among the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. In 1972, with the adoption of a new constitution, the country came to be known as 'Sri Lanka' and 'Ilankai' in Tamil. As John Clifford says, "[T]he island's changing name indicates that its geographical location has proven historically congenial to the intersection of many different cultures for more than two and a half millennia."[6] Aloysius Pieris claims:

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2 In this chapter 'Sri Lanka' (SL) will be referred to as 'Ceylon', as it was known in the colonial era.

3 Cf. W.J.M. Lokubandara, "Sri Lanka's Role in Maritime Route," in *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of the Sea,* eds. Senake Bandaranayake, el at.,… (Colombo: Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO and the Central Cultural Fund, 1990), 21.

4 *Taprobane* is a Greek mispronunciation of *Tambrapanni*.

5 Sinhala *dvip;* gave the English word serendipity – pleasant, quietness of the island's people.

6 John Clifford Holt, ed. *The Sri Lanka Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

> One must not forget that Sri Lanka was an island *only* in the geographical sense. Historically and sociologically, it was a *highway* open and hospitable to many people of diverse religio-cultural provenance: Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Chinese, Indonesians, Indians … and, later Portuguese, Dutch and British. Some passed through the country to other destinies while others settled down in it and some temporarily conquered it. Whether one admits it or not, the people of this country carry in their veins the blood of many ethnic groups that have become part of the nation; and all have left their traces behind in languages, customs and religious beliefs of the land.[7]

SL has a great history which spans over 3000 years and records "numerous waves of immigrations emanating out of various regions of South Asian subcontinent, and has been home to the formation of Sinhala-Buddhist and Tamil-Hindu civilisation, whose linguistic, religious, and cultural elements originated in India …"[8] After centuries of Indic civilisation, some parts of the country were colonised by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century and by the Dutch in the seventeenth century; finally, the whole country came under the rule of the British in CE 1815. After 450 years (CE 1550-1948) as a colony of three Western powers, the country gained independence on February 4, 1948.

Today this island has become a home to different ethnic and religious communities along with the indigenous people due to various factors in history. Therefore, today's SL is considered a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural country. This brief historical introduction puts the study of the present socio-political context of SL in a more contemporary perspective.

1.1 The Ethnic and Linguistic Situation

It has to be highlighted, as Jayadeva Uyangoda says, that demographers and the ethnic intellectuals give utmost priority to religion, gender, ethnicity and language as categories for classifying populations. He further notes, "it [classification of population] produced majorities and minorities in numerical terms, often in exact numbers with percentages. Thus majority-minority classification becomes a technology of power

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7 The English version of a German original, Aloysius Pieris, "Buddhismus und Gewalt: Ein Blick auf die Situation in Sri Lanka," *Forum Weltkirche* (Verlag Herder, Freiburg) 133 (Nov-Dec, 2014): 21.

8 John Clifford Holt, ed. *The Sri Lanka Reader,* 1.

available to the state. Then it becomes a weapon in the hands of the ethnic intellectuals."[9] However, the intention of describing the ethnic, national, linguistic, religious and other social realities of SL is to give the background knowledge that is imperative to the study of war-widows in SL.

SL is a pluralistic society, composed of two major communities: the Sinhalese and the Tamils, along with Muslims, Burghers and *Veddas* (indigenous people in SL). SL now has a population of about twenty million (according to the 2012 census 20,0263,723) with 52.8 percent women and 47.2 percent men.

Table 1: Sri Lanka: A Profile of the Country
Population and Land Area by Provinces

Province (a)	**Population (b) '000**	**Land Area (Sq. Km.)**	**Population Density (c)**
Western	5836	3593	1620
Central	2569	5575	461
Southern	2472	5383	459
Northern	1063	8290	128
Eastern	1558	9361	166
North Western	2379	7506	316
North Central	1263	9741	129
Uva	1265	8335	151
Sabaragamuwa	1925	4921	390

Composition of population (Census 2012)

Sinhalese	74.9%
Sri Lankan Tamils	11.2%
Indian Tamils	4.2%
Moors	9.2%
Others	0.2%

(a) Provisional

(b) Based on Census of Population and Housing carried out in 2012, covering the entire island.

(c) Persons per sq. Km.

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka (Annual Report 2012)

9 Jayadeva Uyangoda, "Religion and Politics in South Asia," *Dialogue* xxxv and xxxvi (Colombo: The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 2008 and 2009): 81.

The Sinhalese live mainly in the Central, Western and Southern parts of SL while the Tamils live mainly in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country.

The Sinhala and Tamil communities each have long-standing histories, traditions, cultures, languages and territory. The Pāli *Chronicles*, a historical literary source, provides a valuable source for the history of Theravāda tradition in India and SL. It presents the Sinhalese as the descendants of Prince Vijaya from Northern India, and records them as sharing much with the Indo-Aryan culture.[10] K.M. de Silva emphasises that there are arguments to suggest that the author monk of this *Great Chronicle* added the 'myth of Prince Vijaya' in order to prove that Sinhala-Buddhist converts were Aryans.[11] Other arguments indicate that Tamils settled in the country even before the invasion of Prince Vijaya.[12] Richard Gombrich notes that "the whole *Mahavamsa* [Pāli: *Mahāvaṃsa*] is written in a nationalistic spirit, and the Tamils frequently figure in it as enemies of the Sinhalese and hence of Buddhism."[13]

Paul E. Pieris notes that the North of Ceylon was a flourishing settlement centuries before Vijaya was born: such was its condition before the commencement of the Christian era.[14] For Paul E. Pieris, "a country which is only thirty miles from India and which would have been seen by the Indian fishermen every morning as they sailed out to catch their fish would have been occupied as soon as the continent was peopled by men who understood how to sail."[15] Even though both Tamils and Sinhalese arrived from India, these completely different narratives of their settlement have become a problematic issue regarding the ownership of the country many decades after independence.

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10 Cf. Wilhelm Geiger, trans. *The Mahāvaṃsa or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon,* 4th edition (New Delhi: Asian Education Service, 2003), 53-54.

11 Cf. K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (London: Hurst and Company, 1981), 3-4.

12 Cf. H.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Ethnic Unrest in Modern Sri Lanka: An Account of Tamil-Sinhalese Race Relations* (New Delhi: M.D. Publications PVT LTD, 1994), 6.

13 Richard Gombrich, "Is the Sri Lankan War a Buddhist Fundamentalism?" in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka,* ed. Mahinda Deegalle (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 31.

14 Cf. Paul E. Pieris, as quoted by M.D. Raghavan, *India in Ceylonese History, Society and Culture,* 2nd revised edition (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1969), 55.

15 Ibid., 55.

Being an Island at the heart of the Indian Ocean, SL is a trading hub that attracted many traders. As a result, with the arrival of traders in SL in the eighth century, there was soon an ethnic community of Muslims who can now be divided into three main categories: the Sri Lankan Moors – who trace their roots back to Arab traders, the Indian Moors who trace their roots to immigrants who came to the country during the colonial period, and the Malays who, with the consent of the Dutch colonisers, came to SL from Indonesia mainly as soldiers during the period of Dutch colonisation. Indian Tamils or so called hill-country Tamils were brought by the British from South India during the period of colonisation in the nineteenth century to work in the tea plantations of the hill-country in SL. Due to their contested citizenship they have been victims of state, structural and social violence.[16] The three Citizenship Acts, passed by parliament from 1948 to 1949, annulled the rights of the settled Indian labourers. The story of the 'Indian Tamils' reveals:

> How the rights and dignity of a community can be derogated while the law pretends to be equitable. It takes us back to the Citizenship Acts as the thin end of the wedge leading to the degradation of life in this country and progressive disintegration of the state. The deliberate or unconscious tampering with official records to conceal the effects of government policy on the minority is a dangerous trend that eventually renders the entire state machinery devoid of credibility.[17]

Burghers are the other ethnic group that became an addition to Sri Lankan society due to the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonisation from 1505 to 1948. 'Burgher' is a term related to the Europeans who lived during the Dutch period. After independence in 1948, many Burghers left

16 As soon as independence was gained, the Sri Lankan government with the support of some Ceylon Tamil parliamentarians revoked the Indian Tamils' citizenship in 1948, considering them not to be fully citizens of Sri Lanka. The government also suspected that, as Indian Tamils, they would support Ceylon Tamils in terms of political issues. As a result, thousands of Indian Tamils had to go back to India. However, since 2003 Indian Tamils were granted citizenship in Sri Lanka. Cf. Daniel Bass, *Everyday Ethnicity in Sri Lanka: Up-Country Tamil Identity Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 25.
Henceforth, so called 'Indian Tamils' will be referred to as 'hill-country Tamils'.

17 Rajan Hoole, *Palmyra Fallen: From Rajani to War's End* (Jaffna: University Teachers for Human Rights, 2015), 39.

the country, migrating to European countries or Australia, because they lost their identity in the country. Besides these ethnicities, there are also '*Veddas*' who form the smallest ethnic group in the country. They are the earliest inhabitants of SL, dating back to as early as 18000 BCE, even before the Sinhalese and Tamils.[18] The *Veddas* are divided into three main clans: (1) jungle *Veddas*; (2) village *Veddas*; and (3) coast *Veddas*.[19] The social system of the *Veddas* consists of a clan organisation with matrilineal descent.

One of the key factors of Sri Lankan's ethno-national heritage is the politics of language, which has fuelled many conflicts both in the past and the present. The main language of the Sinhala people is Sinhala whereas Tamil is the main language of the Tamils and many of the Muslims in the country. Many Burghers and a small number of people from all the other ethnicities speak English. With the implementation of the 'Sinhala Only Act', in 1956, Sinhala became the official language in SL.[20] In 1958, GoSL passed the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act (No. 28 of 1958) declaring Tamil as the official language in the North and East, due to the grievances of the Tamils. However, correcting the position of the thirteenth Amendment in 1987 to Article 18 of the 1978 Sri Lankan Constitution,[21] the sixteenth amendment (1988) to the present Sri Lankan constitution (original promulgation in 1978) recognises both Sinhala and

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18 The word '*Vedda*' is derived from the Sanskrit word '*vedha*' and the Tamil word '*vedar*', meaning hunter. Regarding the origin of the *Veddas*, Spittel says, "I incline to the view that they are an off-shoot of one of the wild autochthonous tribes of India, who crossed over to Ceylon, in prehistoric times, when the two lands were one, and subsequently got cut off by the inroad of the sea." R.L. Spittel, preface to *Wild Ceylon: Describing in Particular the Lives of the Present Day Veddas* (Colombo: The Colombo Apothecaries Co. Ltd, 1924).

19 Cf. R.L. Spittel, *Far-Off Things: The History, Legends, People including the Veddas Aborigines, Jungle Love and Adventure of Ceylon,* 3rd edition (Colombo: Sooriya Publications, 2001), 98.

20 Official Language Act No. 33 of 1956: An Act to Prescribe the Sinhala Language as the One Official Language of Ceylon and to Enable Certain Transitory Provisions to be Made.

21 The 13th Amendment in 1987 to Article 18 of the *Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978* is: "The official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala. Tamil shall also be an official language. English shall be the link language."

Tamil as the two official and national languages while English is the link language.[22]

Since independence in 1948, the Sinhalese who are the dominant ethnic group in the country have been accused of discrimination against Tamils in the era of post-independence nation building. The ethno-national conflict between the Sinhalese (represented by the GoSL) and the Tamils (represented primarily by S.J.V. Chelvanayagam and his political party and later on by the LTTE) led to three-decades of war in SL, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

1.2 The Religious Atmosphere

Marshal Fernando notes:

> Thus religion occupies a very significant aspect of the daily lives of the people. At the same time the state too actively collaborates to strengthen and nourish religions in general, through patronage, material benefits and even to the extent of creating ministries and departments of the government to look after the interests of different religions.[23]

Sri Lankans are attached to their own religion and its variety of rituals, belief systems and customs, which shape their social, religious, economic and political relationships. However, as Nalin Swaris claims, even though Sri Lankan society is intensely religious, violence continues and accordingly there would seem to be a contradiction between the intense religiosity and corruption in Sri Lankan society. In his view, religion in SL is usually restricted to individual devotion and plays a very minor role in public affairs and social ethics.[24]

Of the four religions prevailing in the country, namely Theravāda Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, Buddhists form the majority (Table 2).

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22 Cf. The 16th Amendment to *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978,* chapter IV, articles 18 and 19.

23 Marshal Fernando, "The Role of Religion in a Situation of Armed Conflict: Some Reflections on the Reality of Sri Lanka," *Dialogue* xxviii (Colombo: The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 2001): 20.

24 Cf. Nalin Swaris, quoted by Karel Steenbrink, "Views of Conflict and Reconciliation," in *Religion, Conflict and Reconcilliation: Multifaith Ideals and Realities,* eds. Jerald D. Gort et al.,... (Rodopi: Amsterdam and New York, 2002), 386.

Table 2: Composition of Population in Sri Lanka by Religion

Religion	Percentage (%)
Buddhism	70.2
Hinduism	12.5
Islam	9.6
Christianity	7.6
Other	0.1

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka (Annual Report 2012)

According to the census and statistics of SL (2012), nearly all Buddhists are Sinhalese, most Hindus are Tamils and most Muslims profess Islam. Christians are mainly Catholics, followed by the Protestants and are the only religious communities that include both Sinhalese and Tamils and thus cut across ethnic boundaries. However, it is essential to mention that, as Peter Schalk asserts, according to the *Mahāvaṃsa* (*Great Chronicle*) – the historical chronology of SL from the sixth century BCE to the fourth century CE and the single most authoritative work of Sri Lanka's origin – there was a *Damila Bhikkhu Saṅgha* (a community of Tamil Buddhist monks) and there were Tamil mercenaries, merchants, and settlers who became Buddhists and were accepted in the military and civil administration.[25] Schalk also states:

> If we put all writings together which have been generated in Tamil by Tamil speakers during the pre-colonial period, we get not more than one thick volume. One scripture in this imagined book is *Manimēkalai tuṟavu* which has been elevated in the modern period as a typical representative of Tamil Buddhism.[26]

Christianity in SL arrived saddled with an aggressive ideology of Euro-Nationalism, more popularly known as 'Colonialism'. A. Pieris says that Christianity came across more "as a euro-ecclesiastical expansionism that threatened the mission of the 'chosen people' rather than as the message of deliverance that Jesus, the Holy Man from West-Asia wished

25 Cf. Peter Schalk, "Buddhism among Tamils: An Introduction": http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:604434/fulltext01.pdf (accessed 12 July 2014).

26 Peter Schalk, "Buddhism among Tamils: An Introduction": http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:604434/fulltext01.pdf (accessed 12 July 2014).

to share with them."[27] Apart from the four major world religions, there are practitioners of other religious traditions, such as Jainism and Animism: they constitute 0.1 percent of the total population. However, it should be noted that prior to the establishment of the four major religions in the country there were many aboriginal cults and beliefs in ancient SL.

Buddhism and Hinduism were the indigenous religions in the country. Islam was added to the community of the island with the arrival of Arab traders, and Christianity came with Western colonisation (1505-1948 CE). Buddhism, according to the *Mahāvaṃsa*, was introduced to the country by Mahinda Thera, the son of the Indian King Asoka, during the reign of King Devanampiyathissa in 250 BCE, and it has been the dominant religion in the country ever since. The message sent by King Asoka through his son Mahinda Thera was: "I have taken refuge in the Buddha, his Doctrine and his Order, I have declared myself as a lay-disciple in the religion of the Sakya son; seek then even thou, O best of men, converting thy mind with believing heart refuge in these best of gems!"[28] However, archaeology and history seem to indicate that Buddhism existed in SL long before Mahinda's arrival. Based on different political and historical influences many Buddhists think that this island belongs to the Buddhists and that Buddhism must be preserved in SL.[29] A. Pieris states:

> The Sinhala People, who had settled down in Sri Lanka as a separate ethnic community of refugees expelled from Northern India, perhaps five centuries before the Common Era, had embraced Buddhism and had tried to define their national identity through a historiography, which is said to be the first of its kind in South Asia. It is in this national biography, known as the *Mahāvaṃsa* or the Great Chronicle that their monastic mentors defined their self-understanding as a **Chosen People**, so-to-say; that is, a people specially chosen by the dying Buddha to be *the* nation that was entrusted with the practice and the preservation of his Sacred Doctrine and Discipline (*Dhamma-Vinaya*). Thus Buddhism had become the defining element of the Sinhala Nation. This view seems to have its basis in the historical fact that Buddhism disappeared from India, the place of its birth, and remained

27 Aloysius Pieris, "Buddhismus und Gewalt: Ein Blick auf die Situation in Sri Lanka," 21.

28 Wilhelm Geiger, trans. *The Mahāvaṃsa or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon,* 80.

29 Cf. Ananda Wickremeratne, "Historiography in Conflict and Violence," in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka,* ed. Mahinda Deegalle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 121.

> the official religion of the Sri Lankan State, which eventually became the missionary centre whence Buddhism was carried to other countries of the South Eastern regions of Asia.[30]

In speaking of different categories of people in relation to religion, Marshal Fernando says that there are three categories of people in the country: (1) The religious hierarchy and lay leaders who play power politics; (2) The adherents – those who participate in religious rites by going to the religious places and those who claim that they belong to a particular religion but do not practise religion seriously; and (3) Small religious groups composed of laity and clergy who do take religious teachings somewhat seriously, and engage in social action.[31]

In the Sri Lankan constitution the foremost place is accorded to Buddhism, while the rights of all other religions in the country are assured.[32] There is no doubt that Buddhism plays a powerful role in the different dimensions of the country, including politics. As Marshal Fernando states, historically religious institutions in SL enjoyed state patronage and continue to do so. Hence, due to the relationship between state and religion in SL, the politicians of the country have an enormous opportunity to manipulate those institutions to fulfil their narrow sectarian party interests.[33]

Martin Quere, speaking about the religious situation of the country before the Portuguese invasion writes, "[R]eligious tolerance prevailed in the country. In general, the people were content with following the religion of their forefathers."[34] Even today, one has, in theory, the freedom to practise the religion of one's choice in SL, which naturally leads to religious harmony in the country.[35] Nevertheless, there are conflicts between extreme Buddhist groups and ethnic and religious minority

30 Aloysius Pieris, "Buddhismus und Gewalt: Ein Blick auf die Situation in Sri Lanka," 24.

31 Cf. Marshal Fernando, "The Role of Religion in a Situation of Armed Conflict: Some Reflections on the Reality of Sri Lanka," 28.

32 Cf. *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978,* chapter II, article 9.

33 Cf. Marshal Fernando, "The Role of Religion in a Situation of Armed Conflict: Some Reflections on the Reality of Sri Lanka," 24.

34 Martin Quere, *Christianity in Sri Lanka under the Portuguese Padroado 1597-1658* (Colombo: Catholic Press, 1995), 4.

35 Cf. *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978,* chapter III, article 10.

groups. Religious fundamentalism has become an issue of national security. Fundamentalism, especially Buddhist, is not just a phenomenon propagated by a small group, but attacking the practitioners of minority religious traditions has become a norm. Some Buddhist groups, including the leaders, have started a virulent and even violent campaign against Tamil, Muslim and Christian minorities in recent times, and as a result, Christian, Hindu and Islam places of worship have been attacked. As A. Pieris claims:

> For this minority of extremists, their religion has become something to possess, guarded and preserved rather than translated into a life-style; a heritage to be jealously protected rather than a path to be zealously pursued. Greed (which St. Paul defines as idolatry) – even when the object of greed/ idolatry is one's own religion – is the source of evil as all religions teach. Such fanaticism is noticeable among the fundamentalist Christian groups in the Bible Belt of USA, among the advocates of Hindutva in India and in the extremist movements such as Al Qaeda, the Taliban, ISIS, etc. in Islam.[36]

Observing the discriminatory policies of the *Bodu Bala Sena* (BBS), a Sinhala extremist Buddhist group, Suren Raghavan says, "… after ethnic nationalism, religion seems to be the most available avenue for those who seek power without accountability by passing democracy."[37]

The role of women is restricted in all the religious communities of SL, even though women play an active role in transmitting religious traditions and values from one generation to the next, especially in their role as mothers and teachers. The mothers are the first teachers who teach the basic truths, beliefs and rituals of their religion to the children and they make up the majority of those who actively participate in religious activities. Despite their major role in their religious traditions, they are excluded from decision-making, solely because they are women. Compared to men, women face more restrictions, rules and rituals in their own religious spheres. Some women do however resist harmful traditions, customs and rituals of the existing male dominated religious structures.

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36 Aloysius Pieris, "Buddhismus und Gewalt: Ein Blick auf die Situation in Sri Lanka," 26.

37 Suren Raghavan, "Sri Lanka: Towards a Militant Sangha State?,": http://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/sri-lanka-towards-a-militant-sangha-state/ (accessed 23 November 2013).

1.3 The Economy since Independence

Sri Lanka's economy has undergone significant structural changes throughout history. Since the independence in 1948, the economic policies have been shaped by the conflictual political culture of the country and global economic trends. Hence, the history of the Sri Lankan economy can be divided into five periods: (1) 'The Liberal Economic Regime' (1948-1956); (2) 'Closed Economy with Interventionist Policies' (1956-1970); (3) 'Regulated Economic Policies' (1970-1977); (4) 'Opening up of the Economy' (1977-1994); and (5) 'Open Economy with a Human Face' (Post 1994).[38]

With the introduction of a new liberal economic policy, a major change in the economy of SL took place in 1977.[39] The policy of shifting away from the socialist economy, encouraged foreign and private investments, entrepreneurship, and setting up of special economic zones (FTZ) to privatise some parts of the public sector.[40] The 'Opening up of economy' paved the way for collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). The shifting economic policies in the period after the independence created major conflicts in the country. One of the major problems was unemployment – mainly among educated rural youth. "The government continued with the provision of research... extension services and irrigation, while removing the controls on the importation of agricultural inputs and machinery. The purchase of paddy fields from farmers under the floor price scheme declined sharply."[41] The economic crisis of that time paved the way for many youths in the rural areas of Southern SL to take up arms against the government. The uprising

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38 For a detailed study see, Sajith de Mel, "Economic Policy Shifts in Sri Lanka,": http://dl.nsf.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/1/14327/ER-34(9)_43.pdf?sequence=2 (accessed 15 September 2016).

39 J.R. Jayawardene, a member of "The United Nations Party" who came to power in 1977 associated with a more laissez-faire approach to economic policy than that of the socialist-oriented Sri Lankan Freedom Party. The accusation against this policy is that it widened the gap between the rich and the poor and destroyed the self-sufficiency of the farming system.

40 Free Trade Zones (FTZ) were mainly established to promote foreign investment through tax-exempt, export-oriented manufacturing facilities and better infrastructure.

41 P.J. Gunawardana and W.G. Somaratne, "Economic Policy Regimes and Non-Plantation Agriculture in Sri Lanka since 1970," in *Sri Lanka's Development since Independence: Socio-Economic Perspectives and Analyses,* eds. Weligama D. Lakshman Clement and A. Tisdell (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2000), 190.

of the rural youth slowed down economic growth and saw a drastic decline in the economy of the country. The ethno-national war of SL, which lasted for three decades, also adversely affected the entire economy of the country and very recently the 2008 global economic crisis doubled the negative effects on the economy.

Considering the country's negatively impacted economic sectors, which were a result of various economic shifts of the past decades, the WB statistics describe SL as a lower-middle income country.[42] Unemployment, especially among women and graduates, high inflation and decline in agriculture, can be considered as factors which negatively affect the economy of the country. The main sources of income today are tourism, exports – textiles, tea, rubber, coconut, gems – and overseas employment. It has to be mentioned that today the open economy of the country is heavily dependent on women, especially the ones who are working in the textile sector, the plantation workers/tea pluckers and the migrant workers in the Middle East. As Naoko Otobe elucidates, despite women's substantial contribution to bringing foreign exchange into the country, in general, women in the labour market – women workers in export sectors including garment factories and those in the 'plantation sector' who work under poor working conditions – are discriminated against and are being paid low wages, because of their gender.[43]

The continuous inferior position of women in comparison with the position of men on the labour market is mainly due to traditional perceptions of gender roles in society: women are care-takers of family and men are the breadwinners.[44] In the Northern and Eastern regions of the country there is a rise in the number of working women as a result of the war, and in female-headed families women have become the main breadwinners. As the consequence of losing their male partners, many Tamil women face new economic challenges that are relatively new to Sri Lankan society.

The economic environment of the country is mostly inter-connected with the political issues and the relationships with the international

42 Cf. "World Bank List of Economies 2013,": http://www.siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/ (accessed 20 October 2013).

43 Cf. Naoko Otobe, "*Globalization*, *Employment and Gender in Open Economy of Sri Lanka," Employment Sector: Employment Working Paper* no. 138 (2013): 1.

44 Cf. Ibid., 7. In the plantation sector, most women workers are involved in fieldwork such as plucking and harvesting while men work in the offices.

community. SL is very dependent on China, Iran and Japan for foreign assistance and among them China is a major lender of funds for infrastructure projects. The United States of America (USA) and the European Union [EU] are the major buyers of the country's export products. As Rajan Hoole notes:

> China's involvement in Lanka would not only exacerbate local and regional tensions but also cause huge environmental destruction, particularly in the Northern and North Central Provinces. Chinese loans are being used to consolidate Sri Lanka's military presence in the North through land takeovers, marginalisation of war-affected Tamils and huge illicit deforestation timber by the Defence Ministry including in reserves, using the land powers of the Mahaweli Authority as legal cover.[45]

1.4 The Political Ambiguity

The history of SL shows that up and until the sixteenth century, there were different territorial kingdoms on the island, each kingdom being ruled by a local king. Even though the king had a cabinet to help him in matters of governance, the king was powerful. He had, however, to abide by traditions. This political system that prevailed for centuries in SL was challenged in the sixteenth century with the invasion of the Portuguese (1505-1796), followed by the Dutch (1796-1815) and until 1815 when the whole country fell under British rule.[46]

The existing political legislative system of the country is greatly influenced by the British political system. For example, the first Executive Council and the Legislative Council were established in 1833 by the British, later dissolved and replaced with the State Council of Ceylon in 1931. Later in 1947, based on the Westminster model, a new binomial parliament was established by the British rulers.[47] SL became independent in 1948. Yet, even after independence, the nominal head of the Sri Lankan parliament was the British Queen until 1972. The political situation after independence was strongly influenced by British policies, engendering many conflicts not only between Sinhalese and Tamils but also among the Sinhalese themselves.

In 1972, after the abolition of the Senate, the Republican constitution was introduced and the House of Representatives was converted into the

45 Rajan Hoole, *Palmyra Fallen,* 469.

46 Cf. K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka,* 81-90.

47 Cf. Ibid., 356-369.

National State Assembly. In 1977, the constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of SL was enacted. In the existing constitution, the head of the 'Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka' is the executive President.[48] He/she acts as the Head of State, Head of government and Commander in-chief of the armed forces. There are 225 members in the parliament and they are elected on the basis of proportional representation for a six-year term on the basis of universal suffrage, which was granted by the British in 1931, irrespective of race, ethnicity, language or gender. The president is elected for a six-year term, but according to the new Amendment introduced in 2010, the president can be re-elected. By abolishing independent commissions, which were established through the seventeenth Amendment, the controversial eighteenth Amendment was passed by the Sri Lankan Parliament in 2010.[49]

As per the eighteenth Amendment, the executive presidency was given enormous powers where "… the president is elected in terms of this Article for a further term of office, the provisions of this Article shall *mutatis mutandis* [the necessary changes having been made] apply in respect of any subsequent term of office to which he (*sic*) may be so elected."[50] In 2015, the nineteenth Amendment to the constitution of SL empowered 'Independent Commissions' and 'the Judiciary', while repealing the eighteenth Amendment that gave extreme powers to the executive presidency. The nineteenth Amendment states, that "[N]o person who has been twice elected to the office of President by the people shall be qualified thereafter to be elected to such office by the People."[51] Article 35 of the Constitution is hereby repealed and the following Article is substituted herewith:

> (1) While any person holds office as President of the Republic of Sri Lanka, no civil or criminal proceedings shall be instituted or continued against the President in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by the President, either in his official or private capacity: Provided that

48 Cf. *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978,* chapter I, article 4 (b).

49 Cf. The 18th Amendment to *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978.*

50 The 18th Amendment to *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978,* articles 2 (2) (b), 2010.

51 The 19th Amendment to *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978,* article 4, (1) (2).

nothing in this paragraph shall be read and construed as restricting the right of any person to make an application under Article 126 against the Attorney-General, in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by the President in his official capacity: Provided further that the Supreme Court shall have no jurisdiction to pronounce upon the exercise of the powers of the President under Article 33(2)(g).

(2) Where provision is made by law, limiting the time within which proceedings of any description may be instituted against any person, a period of time during which such person holds the office of President of the Republic of Sri Lanka shall not be taken into account in calculating any period of time prescribed by that law.

(3) The immunity conferred by the provisions of paragraph (1) shall not apply to proceedings in the Supreme Court under paragraph (2) of Article 129 and to proceedings under Article 130 (a) relating to the election of the President or the validity of a referendum.[52]

The establishment of universal suffrage in SL in 1931 gave both men and women the right to vote. In 1958 SL became the first country in the world to be governed by a female Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, widow of the former Prime Minister, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike. In SL women are the major contributors to the country's foreign exchange earnings and their literacy rate is high, yet women's participation in the political structure of the country remains insignificant.

Table 3: Political Representation of Women in SL

Elected Political Body	Year	Representation of women Nominations for Women					
		Total Number	No of Women	% of Women	Total Nominated	Nominated Women	% Women Nominated
Parliament	2004	225	13	5.8	6,060	375	6.2
	2010	225	13	5.8	7,619	n.a	n.a
Provincial Councils	2004	380	19	5	4,863	373	7.7
	2008-2009	417	17	4.1	9,365	711	7.5
Local Councils	2006	3,942	74	1.8	25,911	n.a	n.a

Notes: n.a. indicates not available.

Source: cited in United Nations Development Assistance Framework 2013-2017.

52 The 19th Amendment to *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978,* article 7.

Many women are discouraged from being involved in politics due to cultural stereotypes, which bind them to their role as mothers. According to Table 3, it is clear that the Sri Lankan political system is highly male dominated. For example, in SL, the former Minister of Child Development and Women's Affairs (2010-2015) was a male politician and his attitude towards women was most unacceptable. He states:

> Even though we have paid special attention to the protection of women's rights, when a woman is given authority in a department or a ministry they tend to suppress other women who are under their administration out of jealousy. This situation will lead to inefficiency in that particular organisation. Hence, always the main chair should be given to a male and the assistant should be a female.[53]

Since this statement degrades women it was vehemently condemned by activists and organisations working for women's rights. The Beijing Declaration and Platform Action states, "[W]ithout the active participation of women and the incorporation of the women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved."[54] The lack of participation of women in politics can be one of the major reasons for the violation of women's rights, sexual harassment and other gender-based violence in the country. Female representation in politics is almost negligible. There is no voice to raise the rights of women and the responsibility of all citizens in the country to affirm the dignity of women and their contribution to society.

Peter Schalk, identifying the difference between political Buddhism and Buddhist politics says, "[T]here is nothing odd about Buddhist Politics. The Buddha himself was a Buddhist politician. Political Buddhism, however, is controversial because it subordinates Buddhist values to political values."[55] Instead of being Buddhists involved in politics based

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53 Tissa Karaliyadda, "A Male Should Always be the Chairperson,": *Sri Lanka Mirror*: http://archive.srilankamirror.com/news/5843-a-male-should-always-be-the-chairperson (accessed 12 March 2013).

54 "Women in Power and Decision-Making," *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,* article 181, 1995.

55 Peter Schalk, "Operationalizing Buddhism for Political Ends in a Martial Context in Lanka: The Case of Simhalatva," in *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice,* eds. John R. Hinnells and Richard King (New York: Routledge, 2007), 133.

on the teachings of the Buddha, some have manipulated Buddhism for their selfish political motivations to affirm that SL belongs only to the Sinhala Buddhists.

Since SL is in a post-war scenario – after ending the ethno-national war between the GoSL and the LTTE in 2009, which lasted for three decades – the present political situation of the country has become conflictual. The GoSL is criticised by some local and international communities for its grave violations of human rights, perpetrated during the war and in its aftermath. This regards in particular the rights of Tamils, executive influence over the judiciary, growing militarisation, corruption, arbitrary killings, abductions, arbitrary arrests and torture, threatening and attacking journalists who are critical of the government and insecurity of women and children.[56] The family of the former president (2005-2015) occupied key positions in the government during a time in which the country became an increasingly authoritarian state. As Raghavan illustrates, the dominant political forces in the South, such as the United National Party (UNP) and the People's Liberation Front (*Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* – JVP) were in a 'political wilderness' due to the struggles and fights within their parties, resulting in an alternative discourse under which the polity could be recognised.[57]

The change of the former regime (2005-2015) has brought about some changes on a very small scale, yet the most important fact is that there is no difference between the policies of the two regimes with regard to the country's overarching problem. The greatest challenge at the moment is to develop an inclusive, long-term political solution to the ethno-national conflict in the country so that both Tamils and Sinhalese along with other ethnic communities in the country can live in freedom and with dignity.

1.5 'This is Our Culture'

> ... patriarchal political discourses about 'national identity' are always about the control of women but never *only* about the control of women, since they

56 Cf. Adrain Schuter, "Sri Lanka: Current Situation Update": http://www.refworld.org/docid/5243f5dfa.html (accessed 5 December 2015).

57 Cf. Suren Raghavan, "Sri Lanka: Towards a Militant Sangha State?": http://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/sri-lanka-towards-a-militant-sangha-state/ (accessed 23 November 2013).

> are also deployed both locally and nationally for economic and political ends that work through but go beyond such control of women.[58]

SL, like any other Asian country, is rich in its cultural diversity, which makes the culture as such unique and this contributes to the country's identity. The rich cultures of SL do however have a tendency to 'control women', which deprives women of their dignity. Life events, such as birth, puberty (for girls), marriage and death, are dominated by a cultural tradition that is patriarchal and restricts women who in fact transmit the cultural tradition to the next generation. Women also play a vital role in the preservation of culture while handing it on from one generation to the next.

In the perception of many women, changing cultural elements is unacceptable. Consequently, they have the tendency to justify their oppression and marginalisation within family, society and religion, thinking 'this is our culture'. For some, culture is an unalterable factor that overwhelms the lives of people, especially of women. In the midst of oppression women are silent about the suffering they undergo and justify the notion that a culture is unchangeable. This sort of oppression has a greater impact on women participating in nation-state building. Nira Yuval-Davis states that it is women – especially older women – who are given the roles of the cultural reproducers of 'the nation', yet they are not included in the process of nation-state building.[59]

In all the divergences prevailing in Sri Lanka's different cultures, male domination is a common feature. Patriarchy has been an aspect of Sri Lankan culture for many centuries and therefore male domination is prevalent in the religious, social, political and economic spheres. Sri Lankan women have always been seen in relation to men – in childhood to the father, in marriage to the husband and in widowhood to the son. "Patriarchy normalises constructed dichotomies. It normalises practices and relationships, so that gender becomes hidden, unessential and irrelevant. Patriarchy is the experience of the dominant masculinism …."[60]

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58 Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 80.

59 Cf. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications Ltd, 1999), 37

60 Gunhild Hoogensen and Svein Vigeland Rottem, "Gender Identity and the Subject of Security," *Dialogue* xxxv, no. 2 (Colombo: The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, June 2004): 164.

The tradition of women being dependent on men has led to the control of women in family life, religious life, social life and political life. This subordinated position of women in society was strengthened by the foreign missionaries during their rule and eventually, during the post-colonial nation-building in SL.

During the British colonial period, urban women were educated to be 'Victorian ladies'. The main subjects of the girls' missionary schools were Christian Scriptures, prayers and Victorian forms of discipline that were included in the course 'Domestic Science'. This was how Christian missionaries formed girls to be good Christian housewives, restricted to domestic life. Uma Narayan says, "[M]any strands of religious fundamentalism in the Third-World mirror colonialist accounts of Third-world contexts as places culturally defined by unchanging traditions."[61]

In the post-colonial nation-state building project, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists followed the structure of the British, but with a different approach. One of the chief Sinhala Buddhist nationalists, Anagarika Dharmapala, tried to re-cast Sinhala women by presenting the role of Aryan women to them. The Aryan husband trains his wife to take care of his parents and to attend to holy men, his friends and relations. The glory of a woman is achieved by her chastity, the performance of household duties and obedience to her husband.[62] Dharmapala's main purpose was to propagate the idea that all religions, except Buddhism, degraded women, even though he said that, contrary to the Bible, the Qur'an and the Hindu Holy Scriptures, Buddhism respects women. By changing the Christian patriarchal concept of women, Buddhist nationalists introduced a new image of Buddhist women, which was also based on patriarchy. In the nineteenth century, Arumuga Navalar noted that Tamil women who liked to be independent brought ill fame to the family.

> Women should be protected, during their childhood by their fathers, during their youth by their husbands and during old age by their sons. Hence,

61 Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures,* 53.

62 Cf. Malathi de Alwis, "'Housewives of the Public': The Cultural Signification of the Sri Lankan Nation," in *Crossing Borders and Shifting Boundaries: Gender, Identities and Networks,* eds. Ilse Lenz et al.,… (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2002), 25-28.

> women are not independent …. A woman who likes to be on her own without father, husband and children will bring ill-fame on to the family.[63]

The above idea is prevalent amongst Sinhala and Tamil communities, both of which were influenced by the Brahminical mindset in India. The construct of 'family' gives power to men – the father being the head and in his absence the eldest son – who 'control women' as wife, sister and daughter, thus forming the hierarchy of patriarchy.

Although 'motherhood' is a sacred concept that is venerated in the cultures, the social structures control women irrespective of their roles. A woman plays her role as a mother in nurturing children, while decision-making lies with men. This was clearly seen in SL, especially during the past decades of war: mothers as a 'recurring motif in national/revolutionary discourse'[64] and mothers resisting to the prevailing violence in the state. Women as wives and mothers are bound to fulfil many traditional roles such as childbearing, nurturing children, cooking and household work. In many families, wives are considered and treated as secondary to their husbands. For example, one of the findings of a survey conducted using random sampling in the four districts – Colombo (West), Hambantota (South), Batticoloa (East) and Nuwara Eliya (Central) – among 1655 male participants and a smaller 653 female sample group between the ages of 18-49 years portrays:

> A significant majority of men (64 percent) subscribe to the view that childcare is primarily the mother's responsibility, while 57 percent hold the view that women's primary responsibility is that of family and taking care of the home. A majority of men also related manhood to dominance and violence, with 58 percent believing that 'It's manly to defend the honour of your family even by violent means,' and 57 percent agreeing that 'To be a man you need to be tough.[65]

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63 Arumuga Navalar as quoted by Sitralega Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control," in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka,* eds. Pradeep Jaganathan and Qadri Ismail, 2nd edition (New York: South Focus Press, 2009), 159.

64 Neloufer de Mel, "Agent or Victim? The Sri Lankan Woman Militant in the Interregnum," in *Feminists under Fire: Exchanges across War Zones,* eds. Wenona Giles et al.,… (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2003), 63.

65 Nelufer de Mel, Pradeep Peiris, Shyamala Gomez, "Broadening Gender: Why Masculinities Matter: Attitudes, Practices and Gender-Based Violence in Four Districts in Sri Lanka" (Research., Colombo: CARE International, 2013), 23.

Indrani Munasinghe says that even though there were different attitudes towards women who had various roles as mothers, wives, daughters, queens and servants in the past, the women were not looked down on since the Sri Lankan society was shaped by Buddhist teachings.[66] It is worthy to note the fact that Wijesekera states: among *Veddas* there was no gender subordination of any kind, and further says that women were leaders among themselves. As a result, there seemed to have been equal dignity among both men and women in the *Veddas* community.[67]

As Kumari Jayawardena states in an interview: in spite of the experience of the oppression of women in patriarchal society, there has been a consciousness regarding women's issues since the nineteenth century, which directed some women to get together as the women's movement in the twentieth century.[68] The journey of these women's struggles for their emancipation from subjugation and violence and for the affirmation of their dignity, is to be appreciated because it registers that not all women in society are mere victims of the inequitable social structures, but that there are women who are acting to create an alternative society where women could survive in dignity, as their male partners do.

In speaking of the traditional role of women, Swarna Wickremarathne says that "[I]t is, however, possible that the old ways of thinking may soon disappear given the catalyst of rapid economic change in Sri Lanka."[69] Today women are involved in different occupations like their male partners, which is unprecedented. This helps to affirm their dignity as women and, to some extent, to go beyond the traditional role of women. Sometimes, patriarchal domination is curtailed by the class system, due to a high level of education, economic privilege and the ability to act within certain acceptable spheres of social influence. As a result of their education and experience, as well as being influenced by other non-Sri Lankan cultures, some women have the courage to move beyond some cultural restrictions

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66 Cf. Indrani Munasinghe, *Sri Lankan Woman in Antiquity: Sixth Century B.C. to Fifteenth Century A.C.S.* trans. B. Herath (Colombo: Sridevi Printers, 2004), 163-164.

67 Cf. Nandadeva Wijesekera, *Waddange Vikashana Kramaya* [Evolutionary Method of *Veddas*] (Colombo: The Ministry of the Cultural Affairs, 2003), 71.

68 Cf. Kumari Jayawardena, quoted by Wenona Giles, "The Women's Movement in Sri Lanka: An Interview with Kumari Jayawardena," in *Feminists under Fire*, 199.

69 Swarna Wickremeratne, *Buddha in Sri Lanka: Remembered Yesterdays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 9.

with which they do not identify. The women who were actively involved in war over the past three decades, especially female cadres of the LTTE, different women in social activist groups who struggle for the rights of women and some widows in SL demonstrated that they are not prepared to be victims of oppressive cultural expectations.

2. The Ethno-National Conflict in SL

SL is a country in transition that witnessed a three-decade long brutal war between the GoSL and the LTTE, which ended in 2009. It is reported that there have been violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law including the last phase of ethno-national war by various human rights organisations and UN reports. Mahinda Deegalle says, "[O]ne of the problems in understanding the conflict in Sri Lanka is that most try to attribute the current problem to one cause (e.g., as a result of poor economic conditions, a result of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism, or due to terrorist acts of the LTTE)."[70] The ethno-national conflict is not an isolated issue, it is inter-connected with long-standing religious, educational, economic, political and linguistic issues. Hence, it is important to look at the root causes of the SL ethno-national war in a broader, historical perspective in order to understand the conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

The next section will be divided into four parts (1) The antecedents of the ethno-national conflict in SL; (2) The war between two forms of nationalism; (3) The aftermath of war and; (4) International intervention in SL.

2.1 The Antecedents of the Ethno-National Conflict in SL

Mahinda Deegalle states that the roots of the conflict in SL are based on "economic factors, linguistic issues, matters of equal opportunities and human rights, land ownership, demographic representation in the political systems and misunderstandings generated over the centuries."[71] It is therefore important to discuss three main factors, such as colonialism in SL, post-colonial nation-state building, the Buddhist Sinhala nationalism and

70 Mahinda Deegalle, "Buddhism, Conflict and Violence: Introduction," in *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka,* ed. Mahinda Deegalle (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

71 Ibid., 9.

Tamil nationalism. These inter-linked factors have resulted "in the creation and identification of an indigenised 'other' and contributed to the rise of violent militancy as a response to a perceived threat of dissonance."[72]

2.1.1 Colonialism in SL

SL was colonised by the Portuguese, Dutch and British in the sixteenth, seventeenth and nineteenth centuries respectively, due to the economic wealth of the country, the strategic geographical location of the island in the Indian Ocean as well as for religious reasons. The exclusivist interpretation of religions, nations, ethnicities and cultures in the colonial period shaped the roots of the ethno-national conflict in SL.

When the Portuguese arrived, Ceylon had three main kingdoms: the two Sinhala kingdoms of Kotte in the South-West maritime district, the kingdom of Kandy in the Central highlands and the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna in the North.[73] When the Portuguese arrived, the land belonged to two separate nations: the Sinhala and the Tamil nation. Even though the present constitution does not recognise the Tamil nationhood, it is worth mentioning that like Sinhalese, Tamils also possessed a geographical territory, that is, North and East as Tamils' traditional land, with a venerable history, language and culture that shaped their identity. At the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, there were Muslim merchants and their families in the country: the migrants from Arabia.

John Clifford Holt says, "[C]olonialism is not a historical curiosity of the past in Sri Lanka, rather, its legacy persists in a variety of ways that continue to impact contemporary political and economic trajectories."[74] Colonialism impacted the Tamils and Sinhalese in different ways. The following pages examine the socio-political realities of the country during the time of the Portuguese, Dutch and British rule.

2.1.1.1 SL under the Colonisation of the Portuguese (1505-1658)

During the sixteenth century, Portugal colonised Asian countries for the purpose of trade and converted the inhabitants of those countries

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72 Jane Derges, *Ritual and Recovery in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 23.

73 Cf. Martin Quere, *Christianity in Sri Lanka under the Portuguese Padroado 1597-1658,* 1.

74 John Clifford Holt, ed. *The Sri Lanka Reader,* 135.

to Christianity.[75] The Portuguese were attracted by the island's wealth, especially cinnamon of which the King of Kotte had the monopoly. They were also attracted by the island's strategic position in the Indian Ocean.[76] Dom Lourenso de Almeida was, driven by adverse winds, the first Portuguese to arrive in Ceylon in early 1505. His arrival was an astonishing event.[77]

There were internal conflicts and struggles between the kings of the two Sinhala kingdoms on the island during the Portuguese rule.[78] While the Portuguese were planning to extend their coastal establishments in the Indian Ocean, the king of Kotte requested the help of the Portuguese against his brother king in order to expand his kingdom. With the intervention of the Portuguese, the king was able to win the war, yet he became a puppet in the hands of the Portuguese. The Portuguese exploited internal divisions within the island – especially among the ruling families – so that they would be able to extend their power over the island. The Portuguese were able to establish a permanent trading system on the island, which was named Ceylon or *Ceilaõ* by them within a short span of time.

In their desire to secure wealth and power, the Portuguese were heedless of the rights of the natives of the island, committing many acts of cruelty and injustice.[79] Using different strategies, the Portuguese converted Buddhists and Hindus in Ceylon to Christianity as part of subjugating the indigenous people and establishing control over them:

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75 Cf. Martin Quere, *Christianity in Sri Lanka under the Portuguese Padroado 1597-1658*, 23.

76 Before the invasion of the Portuguese, the principle source of royal income in the Kotte kingdom was land revenue, not trade. They were the biggest landowners in the country.

77 Cf. L.E. Blaze, *History of Ceylon* (Colombo, 1933; reprint, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2004), 124-125.

78 For example, during this period, the Kotte kingdom was the largest kingdom in the island that was ruled by the emperor Bhuvanekabahu; a portion of the kingdom was ruled by his brothers. However, all his brothers who ruled a portion of the kingdom was subordinated to the emperor of Kotte. In the beginning of the first part of the sixteenth century there were conflicts between the emperor and his ambitious youngest brother Mayadunne, the ruler of Sitavaka. Cf. K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka,* 100.

79 Cf. L.E. Blaze, *History of Ceylon,* 126.

> Having the belief that all religions other than Roman Catholicism were wrong, the methods the Portuguese used to convert inhabitants of the country were very inhuman. In Sri Lanka the Portuguese record of religious persecution, coercion and mindless destruction of places of worship sacred to other faiths was unsurpassed in its scale and virulence. The establishment of Roman Catholicism was achieved at the cost of tremendous suffering and humiliation imposed on the adherents of the traditional religions and on Islam.[80]

Having the intention of converting the inhabitants to Christianity, the Portuguese started mission schools and only Christians were allowed to study in those schools. They passed harsh and oppressive laws to stop the public practice of Buddhism and Hinduism, demolishing religious places that were sacred to many indigenous people, while building Roman Catholic Churches. Some of the religious places of the indigenous people were given to Catholic religious orders, expelling non-Christian teachers and clergy, separating Christians from non-Christians, and giving all public offices only to Christians.[81]

The Portuguese realised that if the ruler and ruled were of the same faith, it would be quite easy for them to implement their political agenda in the island, and therefore forced or encouraged members of the royal families to become Christians. The new community called 'Christians' was added to the Sinhala and Tamil communities by the Portuguese and the tension between the indigenous community and the new community became widespread during the time of Portuguese colonialism.[82] A divine guarantee was attributed to the conquests, and religion functioned as a political ideology.

Becoming a Christian was not only an act of 'personal salvation', rather mainly an entry into a new political, economic and social sphere. The Christians converted from Buddhism and Hinduism received

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80 K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka,* 128.

81 Cf. L.E. Blaze, *History of Ceylon*, 129.

82 The native people began to use the term 'Christian' at the time of the invasion by the Portuguese in 1505. However, some say that there were already some Christians before the invasion. According to historical facts, St. Thomas the apostle, who lived in Malabar, preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Sri Lanka. Some think he never came even to India, but that his men did come. Cf. P.G. Pieris, *Ceylon: 1505-1658* (London: Times of Ceylon Company Limited, 1923), 23.

preferential treatments in judicial, economic and religious affairs. For example, converts were assured of preferential treatment under the law and exempt from certain taxes. The local aristocracy converted to Christianity on the understanding that they would be able to enjoy the comforts of being accepted into the upper classes of Portugal. As Christianity emerged with the patronage and protection of the state, other faiths and their related cultures were weakened.[83] The indigenous people, especially the Buddhists realised that even though the Portuguese promised to preserve the local laws, customs and traditions of the Sinhalese and Tamils, they had neglected Buddhism and Hinduism; their main focus was spreading Christianity. Having moved to the Kandyan kingdom, a resistance was created by a group of Buddhists against the Portuguese rulers, thus paving the way for the Dutch to arrive.[84]

2.1.1.2 SL under the Colonisation of the Dutch (1658-1796)

For his effort to expand the kingdom of Kandy to the maritime regions,[85] the king of Kandy requested help from the Dutch. The king signed a treaty with the Dutch in 1638 in order to expel the Portuguese from the country. The Dutch were able to oust the Portuguese by 1640.[86] Eventually the Dutch Commercial Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* – VOC) took control over the island's richest cinnamon lands. A Sinhala proverb describes this transfer of power from the Portuguese to the Dutch as: 'we gave ginger and got pepper'. The irony here is that by supporting the expulsion of one coloniser (Portuguese), the supporting country (Dutch) colonised the island.

Initially, the Dutch were not interested in ruling many parts of the island, as the Portuguese had been, because their interest was in the export of spices, mainly cinnamon. K.M. de Silva notes, "[T]heir primary concern was on the extraction of the maximum possible from the lands under their control."[87] They changed the traditional land grant and tenure systems, modified indigenous laws and customs according to the Dutch-Roman

83 Cf. K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka,* 110-125.

84 Cf. P.G. Pieris, *Ceylon*, 28-30.

85 The only kingdom ruled by a Ceylonese king during the rule of the Portuguese.

86 Cf. M.G. Francis, *History of Ceylon: An Abridged Translation of Professor Peter Coutenay's Work* (Mangalore: Codialball Press, 1913), 393-395.

87 K.M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 134.

legal system in order to get a maximum benefit from the lands in SL.

Despite their limited expansion in the country, the Dutch influenced the Sri Lankan culture by converting both Roman Catholics and other indigenous believers (Buddhists and Hindus) to Protestantism. The VOC encouraged the people under their dominion to adopt Protestantism. As did the Portuguese who favoured Catholics, the members of the Dutch Reformed Church [DRC] now had more opportunities than non-Protestants in all fields such as education, occupation, and administration.

The promotion of Protestantism entailed taking over all Catholic establishments such as schools and Churches, introducing a system whereby all the leaders were made to become Protestant. The Dutch banned Roman Catholic practices and prohibited public Buddhist and Hindu religious observances in urban areas, although they allowed religious practices in rural areas. The Dutch were more hostile to the Roman Catholics than to indigenous practitioners of religions. This was due to the antagonism between Protestants and Roman Catholics in the West during the same period. The Dutch prohibited Roman Catholicism by law, took over all Catholic Churches and prohibited Catholic priests from entering the country.[88]

Protestantism was taught in schools and as a result other religions were neglected. Nevertheless, without forcing the Dutch language on indigenous people, they allowed them to continue their education in the vernacular. With the establishment of the printing press in 1737, the Dutch advanced their campaign against Roman Catholicism and indigenous religions by publishing and distributing Christian literature. The Dutch Reformed Church in SL was not very influential because all its members were VOC personnel and for them religion was secondary to trade. The Dutch ruled the island until the British gained power over Ceylon at the end of the eighteenth century.

2.1.1.3 SL under the Colonisation of the British (1796-1948)

In 1796 the British conquered Trincomalee in the Eastern part of the island, a vital base for controlling the Southern coast of India, and took control over the maritime provinces of the island.[89] Since the elite of the kingdom of Kandy were not pleased with King Sri Vikrama Rajasingha, a

88 Cf. M.G. Francis, *History of Ceylon*, 51.

89 Cf. G.C. Mendis, *Ceylon under the British* (Colombo, 1954; reprint, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2005), 17.

South Indian king, they supported the British in dethroning the king. The British signed an agreement, entitled the 'Kandyan Convention', with the Kandyan chiefs. In the convention the British promised to expel the king and to promote Buddhism as the legitimate religion: a pact that resulted in the chiefs agreeing to make the British king their sovereign.[90] Eventually, by conquering the regions controlled by the Dutch, the British expanded their territory to the Kandy kingdom in 1815. However, by the middle of the century, the British barred Buddhism and mistreated the Buddhists. This was the fate of Hinduism too.

While the British and a few high-class Sri Lankan Christians – both Tamils and Sinhalese – enjoyed privileges, native people, especially non-Christian Tamils and Sinhalese were treated as inferiors. History reveals how the Christian community, by supporting the British, suppressed the native people during the colonial period. In Kumari Jayawardena's interpretation, "the landowners who belonged to the *govigama* caste [a high caste] by their loyalty to the British gained titular rank and further extension of their landed wealth."[91] Some Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus, after becoming Christians, ill-treated their own people just as the British did. Of the three Western powers – Portuguese, Dutch and British –, it was the British who exercised the greatest influence on the formation of the present nation-state of SL. "Although the Dutch *plakkaten* (legal proclamations) displayed elements of systematic rule over the subject, it was British rule that most clearly attempted to create a modern colonial state where natives would become colonial subjects."[92]

Modifications in the British administrative structure during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also impacted Ceylon's political and social situation of the past and until the present.

1) The Impact of British Language on Ceylonese

Having gained power, the British closed many Dutch schools and began to promote English teaching schools while promoting Christianity.[93]

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90 Cf. Ibid., 21-22.

91 Kumari Jayawadena, *Nobodies to Somebodies: The Rise of the Colonial Bourgeoisie in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2003), 196-197.

92 Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age* (Honolulu: University of Hawai Press, 2006), 8.

93 Cf. G.C. Mendis, *Ceylon under the British*, 41-43.

The missionaries set up the best English schools mainly in the North and the South-West and only the Christians were allowed to study in those missionary schools. While the English language became the medium of instruction in education and the professional language of employment and administration, the natives who could not master the language were denied prospects for a good life.

The British created an English-Educated-Christian class of people for administrative and professional service. The Ceylonese were granted opportunities in the civil service since 1844, and were given the opportunity to become proficient in English. With the rapid expansion of the tea plantation sector in the mid-nineteenth century, a new social group – an English-educated group consisting of different ethnicities and castes – emerged and became a threat to the traditional elite landowners.[94] Kumari Jayawardena points out that because the economic development during this era was restricted to the Central and Western areas of the country, the Tamils, who mainly lived in the North and East, did not have access to the benefits of this economic development. As a result, the opportunity of employment in the state service was available mostly to those Tamils who had a very good English education.[95] These changes in employment created resentment among many Sinhalese. Hence the Sinhala majority felt that, proportionately, the local Tamils enjoyed an unfair advantage both in educational and administrative fields. The Tamils for their part perceived that it was the Sinhalese who enjoyed disproportionate advantages and benefits in the plantation sector.[96]

2) The Impact of British Administration on Ceylonese

After the Kandyan rebellion of the Buddhists in 1817-1818,[97] by the 1830s, the whole of the island was under one administrative structure

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94 Cf. Ibid., 48.

95 Cf. Kumari Jayawadena, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Regional Security": www.infolanka.com/org/srilanka/issues/kumari.html (accessed 19 October 2013).

96 Cf. Neil De Votta, *Blowback: Lingiustic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (Standford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 65.

97 Sinhalese were not pleased with the British administration, especially for breaking their promise to protect Buddhism. In their anger, Sinhalese in Uva (then a province in the kingdom of Kandy) started their war against the Britsh, but they did not succeed.

controlled by Colombo-London.[98] As Jayarathnam Wilson states, this decision was an assurance against similar uprisings in the future.[99] The two indigenous ethno-nations – Sinhalese and Tamil – who had separate kingdoms, were brought together under the umbrella of British imperial rule. According to Stanley Thambiah, this was the root cause that fuelled the war in the country.[100] Finally, the island was brought under one centralised political authority by the British with a view to their political strategic interest in the Indian Ocean.

It has to be noted that, as mentioned earlier, at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, the island was divided into kingdoms. Political rivalries and upheavals were common among native kingdoms. The rivalries were for power control and not for the reason of ethno-national issues between Tamils and Sinhalese. Qadri Ismail points out that the term 'country' was deployed in two senses in pre-colonial SL: (1) A piece of land inhabited by two nations; and (2) A piece of land with many kingdoms.[101] Nevertheless, during the colonial period the term 'country' referred to two native nations governed by a single colonial state. Even with the independence in 1948, the political notion of 'single-state' did not change. The model of the 'unitary nation-state' gave privileges only to one major cultural and civilisational tradition, one official language: unity as oneness was worshiped as the best idiom.[102] The term 'unitary nation-state' should be understood within its historical context rather than as a static entity.

As Wilson states, the first steps towards a unified administration were taken with the recommendations of the Colebrook-Cameron

98 Cf. Jane Derges, *Ritual and Recovery in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka*, 23.

99 Cf. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka: 1947-1979* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1974), 6.

100 Cf. Stanley Jeyaraja Thambiah, *Sri Lanka Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* (London: I.B. Tauris and Ltd, 1998), 65.

101 Cf. Qadri Ismail, "Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalism: The Southern Tamil (Woman) and Separatist Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka," in *Community, Gender and Violence*, eds. Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jaganathan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 229.

102 Cf. Alfred Stepan, Juan J. Linz and Yogendra Yadav, "The Rise of 'State-Nations," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 21, 3 (July 2010): 55.

Royal Commission of Inquiry in 1831.[103] In 1833 the British introduced the Legislative Council system, a system of representation of all ethnic groups or a communal representation. Even though in 1923 the Legislative Council was expanded so as to have a majority of Ceylonese, the franchise was restricted to four percent of the population.[104] Tamils, together with other minorities, asked for communal representation while Sinhala reformers, on the contrary, wanted territorial representation, and furthermore, wanted the representation to be based on an election rather than on appointment, as many Sinhalese thought that Tamils were favoured by the British government. On the other hand, the Tamils were not satisfied with territorial representation, because what they wanted was communal representation, so that the political interests would not be determined by the Sinhala majority. However, the British proposed territorialism, and only those who were literate in the English language were allowed to vote. Since more Tamils than Sinhalese were thus eligible to vote, the Tamils' suspicion was allayed.

Finally, in 1931 the Donoughmore Commission granted universal suffrage to all Ceylonese which caused a drastic change in the country. On the eve of independence, the Soulbury Constitution granted territorial and demographic criteria for electoral representation by rejecting the minority plea for representation. The Sinhala majority took advantage of their numerical strength. Neil De Votta describes the universal franchise, territorial electorates and majority politics as without any doubt working against the interests of minorities.[105] Based on 'Divide and Rule', the unity of the Sinhala and Tamil elite who worked together for independence broke down over this issue of ethnic representation. As Jayadewa Uyangoda writes, Britain's colonial policies and practices helped to create fissures, especially between the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils.[106]

Since the Sinhala Buddhists formed the majority in the country, the middle class felt that they were isolated and excluded by the British. From the year 1880 onwards, the Sinhala Buddhist rural elite, with the support of

103 Cf. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka: 1947-1979*, 6.

104 Cf. Ibid., 10

105 Cf. Neil De Votta, *Blowback,* 67.

106 Cf. Jayadeva Uyangoda, *Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Changing Dynamics* (Washington: East-West Centre, 2007), 81.

Buddhist monks, gathered together in order to protect their own religion, traditions, customs and culture from the Western style of life. As Kumari Jayawadane says, this movement was thus more anti-Western than anti-imperialist.[107]

In 1948 SL obtained its independence from the British authority, yet, as Rajan Hoole says, "[W]e got our independence only to discover that independence has been hijacked. It had not served the people, but served a handful of people."[108]

2.1.2 Post-Colonial Nation-State Building and the Buddhist Sinhala Nationalism

The Sinhala Buddhist nationalist movement in post-colonial SL, led by Buddhist monks and some lay Buddhist intellectuals, began to express the view that "the political independence of 1948 was an incomplete one, since it did not result in the restoration of the Sinhala-Buddhist state."[109] Hence, during the period 1952-1953, this movement made a series of public policy demands upon identity-based issues such as language, religion, culture and education. Uyangoda summarises the Sinhala nationalism on three levels: (1) A fairly cohesive vision for Sri Lanka's post-colonial nation-state; (2) Articulation of a set of demands – Sinhala as the official language, state patronage to Buddhism, commitment to the protection of the Sinhala-Buddhist culture; and (3) Transformation of the social bases of state power in post-colonial SL.[110] When they achieved their demands, the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalists began to re-interpret the history of SL by emphasising that the country belongs to Sinhala Buddhists.

2.1.2.1 Reinterpreting History

As in the Christian Testament of the Bible, the chosen people occupying Canaan created a narrative to prove their claim to be the people

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107 Cf. Kumari Jarawardena, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and Regional Security": www.infolanka.com/org/srilanka/issues/kumari.html (accessed 25 October 2013).

108 Rajan Hoole, *Palmyra Fallen,* xviii-xix.

109 Jayadeva Uyngoda, "Post-Independence Social Movements," in *Sri Lanka's Development since Independence: Socio-Economic Perspectives and Analyses,* eds. Weligama D. Lakshman Clement and A. Tisdell (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2000), 62.

110 Cf. Ibid., 63.

of Israel, the Sinhala Buddhists too interpreted historical events to suit their belief that SL belongs to them. The strategy used by those nationalists was to reinterpret early Chronicles relating the historical traditions of SL namely *Dīpavaṃsa, Mahāvaṃsa* and *Cūḷavaṃsa* to reconstruct history using many elements of 'origin mythology'.

For Deegalle Mahinda, a careful study of the myth of the battle between King Duttagamini and King Elara is essential for examining the political violence in SL and the growth of nationalism in SL.[111] Walpola Rahula Thera states that "[T]he entire Sinhala race was united under the banner of Gamini [a young Sinhala king who was called King Duttagamini]. This was the beginning of nationalism among the Sinhalese. It was a new race with healthy young blood, organised under the new order of Buddhism."[112] The conflict between the Sinhala King Duttagamini and the Tamil King Elara was not an ethnic war. However, in the process of reinterpreting the *Mahāvaṃsa* text in the period of unitary nation-state building, an attempt was made to prove that this [ethnic] battle was waged by Duttagamini as a measure to protect Buddhism from the foreign rule of Elara.

While stating that the Pāli Chronicle, *Mahāvaṃsa* contradicts the fundamental Buddhist teachings of the Pāli *Canon*, Deegalle Mahinda says that "such violations of the tolerant sensibilities found within post-canonical Pāli Chronicles cannot be justified or harmonised since Buddhist scriptures do not maintain that depending on one's caste, race, or ethnic group the severity of one's negative acts vary."[113]

It was claimed that the Buddha in his infinite wisdom saw that his doctrine would be preserved for 5000 years in SL by these immigrants [Sinhalese] and their descendants.[114] The belief or the ideology was that the survival of Buddhism depended on the survival of the Sinhalese. They considered SL to be the chosen land of the Sinhala Buddhists and Sinhala Buddhists to be the chosen people.

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111 Cf. Ibid., 47.

112 Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon: The Anuradhapura Period: The 3rd Century BC-10th Century AC* (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena, 1956), 79.

113 Mahinda Deegalle, "Is Violence Justified in Theravada Buddhism," *Dialogue* xxix (Colombo: The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 2002), 50.

114 Cf. Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, 79.

2.1.2.2 Discriminatory Policies in Post-Colonial Nation-State Building

There was no notion of unitary nation-state building before colonialism and the concept itself is foreign to the island as it was inspired by the West and became customary in SL after the colonial period. Despite the anti-Western sentiments, after the independence the 'Sinhala-centric' government pursued the same model of unitary nation-state building that did not accommodate the political aspirations of Tamils.[115]

The post-colonial nation-state building privileged only the Sinhala Buddhists. The project was aimed at moulding a Sinhala supremacist vision of SL: "…the Sinhala language, the Buddhist religion and the Sinhala people as an Aryan race."[116] Wilson says that in the post-colonial nation-state building, education, religion, culture, and language became crucial aspects of defining a nation-state and as such Buddhists revivalists proposed to the government: (1) To make the mother tongue the compulsory medium of instruction at all levels of the education system; (2) To declare sinhala the sole official language throughout the country; and (3) To nationalise the schools.[117]

In this new nation-state building the 'All Ceylon Buddhist Congress' in 1956-1959 demanded that "Ceylon should not be allowed to become an Eastern outpost of the Vatican."[118] Accordingly, the new Constitution of 1972 gave Buddhism the foremost place, making it the duty of the State to protect and foster Buddhism.[119] All these changes, the implementation of the 'Sinhala Only Act' in 1956 and the 'Standardisation of Education' in 1971 had adverse effects on the country. Tamil students had to obtain higher marks than Sinhala students in order to enter the university, and there was discrimination against Tamils in the employment sector from 1956-1976. With the implementation of this 'Sinhala Only Act', the minority's opportunities for educational, economic, political, juridical and social interaction were limited; the act failed to give official

115 Sinhala Centric means: even though there is a representation of other ethnic groups in the government, it is centred on the majority Sinhalese.

116 Neil De Votta, *Blowback*, 69.

117 Cf. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Politics in Sri Lanka 1947-1979*, 17.

118 Ibid., 17.

119 Cf. *The Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1978*, chapter II, article 9.

recognition to minorities, especially Tamils who were highly educated and well-qualified.

The new model of a unitary nation-state turned out to be an anti-minority state, where the rights of Tamils, who occupied a particular territory in the country, and of Muslims were violated at various levels: "… Sinhala nationalism re-imagined and re-conceptualised the Sri Lanka's post-colonial state through a pre-colonial idiom of power."[120] Through the discriminatory policies on language, education, economics and politics the government tried to Sinhalasise the state with an exclusivist ideological interpretation of Buddhism.[121] Although "not all Sinhala-Buddhists are nationalists, the sentiment is sufficiently embedded so that Sinhala-Buddhist-nationalism, added to political Buddhism, has weakened Sinhala-Tamil relations and attempts at devolution of power, conflict resolution and dispassionate governance."[122] The unitary nation-state building political project capitalised on Sinhala Buddhist sentiments, opening the path to Tamil nationalism in order to defend the rights of Tamils.

2.1.3 Transformation of Tamil Awareness into Tamil Nationalism

Contrary to the interpretations of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalists, Tamils perceived that independence would be incomplete until it became meaningful to them. The expectations of the Tamils were, "the power relations of the new state need to be re-organised on the basis of ethnic pluralism."[123] In the wake of the discriminatory politics of the post-colonial nation-state building by Sinhala Buddhists, Tamils affirmed that they are a civilisation with a long history, with a distinct culture and language that needed to be preserved.[124] Tamils were not a minority – before colonisation,

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120 Neloufer de Mel, *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict* (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007), 171.

121 Cf. H.L. Seneviratne, *The Work of Kings: The New Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1990), 7.

122 Neil De Votta, *Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka* (Suite: East-West Centre, 2007), 3.

123 Jayadeva Uyangoda, "Post-Independence Social Movements," 62.

124 Cf. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origin and Development in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (London: C. Hurst Co. Ltd, 2000), 1-2.

Tamils lived predominantly as a majority community in Northern SL – but were made a minority by the British when they transformed the whole country into a unitary nation-state.

The rising awareness of the Tamils about the need to protect Tamil culture, tradition, language and their homeland was poignantly expressed by S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, the leader of the Federal Party (FP) and became the focal point of the new Tamil nationalism. The FP leaders adopted seven resolutions and they suggested a federal union with the Sinhalese. Through the seventh resolution, Tamils emphasised an autonomous linguistic state in which no ethnic group would have an advantage over the other. However, for the Sinhalese, federalism and regional autonomy meant separatism. Yet, according to Chelvanayakam, "[I]t will be a complete misnomer to call federalism a separation; federalism is a union. Under a federal set-up the preservation and maintenance of the integrity of smaller units can be assured without in any way taking away the sovereignty of the central government of the country."[125]

Wilson states that after the Official Language Act (Sinhala Only Act) had been passed, Tamil consciousness had evolved into 'Tamil sub-nationalism'. Chelvanayakam was able to channel their struggle through non-violent means without taking arms – some felt that armed resistance was the answer to the struggle of demanding the rights of Tamils – yet many times they were attacked, arrested and punished by the government. In 1976, Chelvanayakam made a historical statement in the National State Assembly:

> We have abandoned the demands for a federal constitution. Our movement will be all non-violent …. We know that the Sinhalese people will one day grant our demand and that we will be able to establish a state separate from the rest of the island ….[126]

The resolutions adopted by the FP based on a model of federal union with the Sinhalese fuelled Tamil aspirations for self-determination,

125 Ibid., 79.

126 Ibid., 129.

because Tamils have a centuries-old distinct Tamil culture and a distinct Tamil territory in the country, as mentioned previously.[127]

The Tamils as a nation have legitimately proved their desire for self-determination in the past, and visibly in the elections of 1977 and 2004. As Nesiah states, "[T]he territorial focus of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism has always been within Sri Lanka. An enduring Sri Lankan Tamil perception is that, while they had, and many continue to have, closed linguistic, religious and other cultural ties with Tamils in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere, their homeland has been and will be this island [SL]."[128]

By the time of Chelvanayakam's death in 1977, as the successive Sinhala centric governments did not respond positively to the non-violent claims for self-determination of the Tamil leaders, the Tamil youth took up arms for their freedom struggle. Perceived discrimination of Tamils was transformed into a Tamil Nationalist movement in order to protect the Tamil community. Just as Sinhala Buddhist nationalism – ethno-religious nationalism – is a reaction to British colonialism, Tamil nationalism – ethno-nationalism – is also a reaction to post-colonial Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and hegemony.

2.2 War between Two Forms of Nationalisms

The Sri Lankan ethno-national war can be considered to be a war between two forms of nationalisms, namely Sinhala-nationalism, which was manipulated by many Buddhists, and Tamil-nationalism. The former is an ethno-religious-nationalism, but the latter is an ethno-nationalism in secular terms. The ethno-national conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils turned into a brutal war, which lasted for three decades.

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127 Karen Parker, a humanitarian lawyer and the president of the association of Humanitarian Lawyers for over twenty years, clarifies the idea of self-determination as, "the collective right of a people to freely determine their own political status and to pursue economic, social and cultural development. People claiming self-determination must claim a history of independence or self-rule in an identifiable territory, a distinct culture, and a will and capability to regain self-governance." She speaks about three main elements of a claim to self-determination: (1) historical self-governance in an identifiable territory; (2) a distinct culture; and (3) a national will and capacity to govern. Karen Parker, "The Sri Lankan-Tamil War is a War of National Liberation in Defense of the Principle of Self-Determination,": http://www.sangam.org/2009/04/Self_Determination.pdf (accessed 2 October 2015).

128 Devanesan Nesiah, "The Claim to Self-Determination: A Sri Lankan Tamil Perspective," *Contemporary South Asia* 10, no. 1 (March 2001): 65.

2.2.1 Ethno-National War in SL (1983-2009)

The 'Black July', anti-Tamil pogrom and riot in 1983 left a destructive mark on an already strained relationship between Tamils and Sinhalese. The riots were a retaliatory measure to the killing of thirteen Sinhala soldiers in Jaffna by the LTTE. The anti-Tamil pogrom was initiated by a fringe section of the government in power of J.R. Jayewardene, first in the capital Colombo and it then spread to other parts of the country. Estimates of the death toll range over three thousand Tamils. Thousands of Tamils were displaced and many left the country. This anti-Tamil pogrom is generally perceived as the beginning of the full-scale armed conflict between the LTTE and the GoSL.[129] The war, which lasted for about three decades, saw tens of thousands of people killed, many displaced, injured and disappeared in the country, mostly Tamils in the North and East.

After the failure of political negotiations and international mediation, especially the intervention of the Indian government and the Cease-Fire Agreement in 2002 mediated by Norway, Mahinda Rajapaksa, the former President of SL (2005-2015) and his regime decided to go for a military solution to the ethno-national conflict rather than remaining true to the aforementioned political negotiations and international mediation. With the support of Sinhala nationalist groups, including many Buddhist monks and also with the support of some foreign countries, the GoSL started a series of military operations in 2006 in the Tamil areas held by the LTTE, causing a massive loss of lives. The GoSL declared 'victory' over the LTTE in 2009 thus 'ending' the three-decade war (1983-2009). From the perspective of the majority of Tamils, the 'ending of war' was the climax of the 'genocide', which had begun with the post-colonial nation-state building project.[130] According to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948, genocide means:

> any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing

129 Cf. Pradeep Jaganathan, "A Space for Violence: Anthropology, Politics and the Location of a Sinhala Practice of Masculinity," in *Community, Gender and Violence*, eds. Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jaganathan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 41.

130 Cf. *Peoples' Tribunal on Sri Lanka*, Bremen, 7-10 December 2013.

members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the groups; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.[131]

The day that was proclaimed as the 'end of war', is celebrated to this day as the 'victory day' by many Sinhalese. However, a small but powerful inter-religious, inter-ethnic and inter-cultural group assembles every year to remember those who died in the war – Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese – and demonstrates their resistance to the government that celebrates the 'victory day' while many suffer the scars of war. This alternative way of responding offers hope to the marginalised people in the country.

The responsibility of any government is to ensure the rights of the people without discrimination, yet the Rajapaksa regime and its security forces not only violated the rights of Tamils and international humanitarian law, but also manipulated the Sinhalese in the South into believing that the war against LTTE was a humanitarian operation to secure the safety of the Tamil people. The GoSL thus made the non-existence of Tamil nation in the unitary state of SL clear.

One cannot justify the attacks carried out by LTTE on the political leaders, on economic hubs, Buddhist religious places and ordinary civilians. Neither can the recruitment of children as combatants, nor the use of women and men as suicide bombers be justified, yet that which led the LTTE to take up arms needs to be understood in the context of Sri Lanka's history. The war between the GoSL and the LTTE was a complex issue, it is not sufficient to merely analyse it on the basis of isolated issues and incidents.

The 'Political Buddhism' and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism that is formed by Sinhala Buddhist mythical/historical narratives have promoted a nationalist ideology that has been manipulated to promulgate Sinhala Buddhist supremacy within a unitary Sri Lankan state. The Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism is visible in such slogans of war as 'war for peace', 'heritage of Sinhala Buddhists' and other similar slogans. The support rendered by many Buddhist leaders towards the government to win the war was clearly visible after the victory when the *Mahanayake Theras of Malwatte* and the *Asgiriya Chapters* awarded the highest title *Vishvakeerthi*

131 "Prevent Genocide International": http://www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm (accessed 12 March 2015).

Sri Tri Sinhaladheeswara to the former Sri Lankan President in 2009, at a special ceremony as a mark of recognition of his leadership in defeating the LTTE.[132]

2.2.2 War and Gender in SL

In her critical analysis of the Sinhala film *Me Mage Sandai* (This is My Moon), directed by Asoka Handagama, released during the war in 2001, Sunila Abeysekera says one of the important lessons history teaches, is that when there is a war, conflict or revolution of any kind, social renovation, the socially accepted traditions, customs and relationships are torn, which gives the victims in society the space to break boundaries that oppressed them for many years. In her view, this film offers a vision of the Sri Lankan war, the role of women and traditional social affairs in relation to the aforementioned perspective.[133] The following poem composed by a former captain of the LTTE Women's Wing, portrays how the traditional role of women began to change with the war:

> Her forehead shall be adorned not with
> *Kunkumam* [a powder used for social and religious markings in Tamil culture]
> (but) with the red blood.
> All that is seen in her eyes is not the sweetness
> Of youth (but) firm declarations of those who have fallen down.
> On her neck will lay no *tali* [marriage necklace] (but) a Cyanide flask!
> Her legs are going and searching,
> Not for searching a relationship with relatives (but) looking towards the
> Liberation of the soil of Tamil Eelam
> Her gun will fire shots.
> No failure will cause the enemy to fall!!
> It will break the fetters of Tamil Eelam.
> Then from our people's lips a national anthem Will tone up!!
>
> Captain Vanathi of the LTTE Women's Wing[134]

Through introducing an open economy to the country, former President J.R. Jayewardene (1977-1989) contributed to the creation of a

132 Cf. "President Mahinda Rajapaksa Conferred Vishvakeerthi Sri Tri Sinhaladheeswara": http://www.army.lk/detailed.php?NewsId=532 (accessed 20 May 2014).

133 Cf. Sunila Abeysekera, *Sthreeya, Sthree Sirura, Sinamawa: Stheevadi Vicharakshiyen Ballemak* [Woman, Body of Woman, and Cinema: A Feminist Critical Perspective] (Colombo: Globe Printing Works, 2013), 105.

134 Vanathi, cited by Neloufer de Mel, "Agent or Victim? The Sri Lankan Woman Militant in the Interregnum," 58.

considerable gap between the rich and the poor, between rural and urban society, the upper and lower-classes. This led to even educated rural youth, especially in the South, joining the military due to the economic imbalance and poverty. Many Sinhalese regarded joining the army as a means of getting a job rather than as a way of fulfilling their duty to protect the Sinhala Buddhist state. The government took advantage of this situation to pursue their aim of fighting against the LTTE. The men who joined the army were held in high regard in nationalist propaganda, by government, by religious leaders especially by Buddhist monks and by civil society. They were considered 'heroes' of the nation.

Even though women gained opportunities to participate in social activities, especially with their husbands, their main role was to be mothers and wives: the concept of 'motherhood' limited women's freedom within society. Although the women were not recruited at the beginning of the conflict to fight, when more people were needed to continue the struggle, both the GoSL and the LTTE persuaded women to join the armed struggle. The LTTE opened its doors to women to join the movement to fight against the Sri Lankan military forces. The LTTE stated for example, "[W]omen are half of our population and hence their participation at various levels of the armed struggle is extremely necessary. Women are the internal revolutionary force in any national movement."[135] When women began to evolve as fighters, their traditional role as wives and mothers expanded: women held a weapon in one hand and a child in the other. They were to be considered not only as mothers of male heroes, but also as fighters who were directly involved in the war.[136] The argument that the, "entry of women into the military is the pre-condition for women's achievement of full citizenship rights", questioned their 'second-class citizenship'. Unlike Sinhala women, Tamil women dedicated their lives to the movement by training in military service on an equal footing with men.

The Tamil women participated in protests and meetings, and sent their husbands and children to the LTTE.[137] This also became an opportunity to critique the patriarchal structure that suppressed women. Hence, it is

135 Sitralega Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Woman,'" 163.

136 Cf. Ibid., 163.

137 Cf. Jane Derges, *Ritual and Recovery in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka*, 165-166.

very important to study the motives of women who participated in militant groups, their motivation in joining the military and their experience within a patriarchal hegemony because what empowers one can disempower another. What empowers one at a given point of history can disempower one at a later period. The Sinhala mothers who sent their children to the military forces were considered 'brave mothers who sacrificed their sons and daughters', on nationalist propaganda. This so-called sacrifice of sending a son/daughter to join the military was seen as a means for a mother to gain *nirvāṇa* (enlightenment).

At the funerals of soldiers, Buddhist monks usually preached the following: "be proud of giving birth to a son who sacrificed his life to protect our country and religion from the enemy." This particular form of Buddhism justified the war and distorted the concept of 'motherhood' in the name of nationalism. Whatever the honour or status these mothers received by way of nationalist propaganda, when they suffered the death and disappearance of their loved ones, some of the mothers and wives of fighters gathered together to share their pain, despite their religion or ethnicity, or they came together to investigate the deaths of their children and to raise a voice against war. 'The Association of Mothers of Missing Youth', 'The Mothers' Front', 'The Mothers and Daughters', and 'The Association of War-affected Women' are prominent examples of women's organisations in the North and the South.[138]

Further, it would not be honest to speak about war without mentioning gender-based violence. In many patriarchal communities, the honour of a community is seen to inhere in the bodies of their women. Radhika Coomaraswamy says, "[D]uring partition women were not only raped by men of the other side, but they were killed by their own fathers and brothers."[139] The idea being that death is better than being sexually violated. Incidents of gender-based violence during the war arose because a male dominated nationalist military, which included Sri Lankan and Indian soldiers, viewed Tamil women in the North and East as 'sexual objects' and considered rape to be a weapon of war to terrify the Tamil

138 Cf. Radhika Coomaraswamy, "Sexual Violence During Wartime," in *Listening to the Silences: Women and War*, eds. Helen Durham and Tracy Gurd (Leiden and Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2005), 64.

139 Radhika Coomaraswamy, "The Disrobing of Draupadi: Women Violence and Human Rights," *Nivedini: Journal of Gender Studies* 11 (July/August 2004): 59.

community. This issue became oppression within oppression.[140] One of the main reasons for men to protect their daughters and wives was based on an idea that rape of a woman by the 'enemy' is a humiliation suffered for failing to protect their daughters and wives. The reaction to such violence was to enlist women in the LTTE because it provided security as well as an opportunity to express women's anger towards the Sinhala military. Yamuna Sanagarasivam gives the reason for a woman to join the LTTE movement:

> When we see our sisters and mothers raped by the army, when we see our brothers taken away, beaten, and killed, when we watch our homes burn up in flames in the aftermath of aerial bombardments, what are we to do? Where do we go to hide, to live? I decided that I was not going to let that happen to me. I was not going to be raped and killed at the hands of the army. I saw the courage of other girls who were joining the movement and decided that this was the way to survive.[141]

Many women's organisations and groups in the South that raised their voices against domestic violence and gender oppression did not speak against the gender oppression of Tamil women in the North and East by the Indian and Sri Lankan armies, because they understood it to be not a problem of Sinhalese. The same ideology prevailed during the JVP uprisings in 1971. Even though they were conscious of the oppression of the Sinhala youth in the South, they did not empathise with the oppression of their fellow youth in the North. Instead, they joined hands with the government, the government that had crushed their rights in the past to suppress the Tamils.[142]

Another type of gender-based violence related to the war was the increase in the sex industry in the Sinhala areas, especially in the North-Central city of Anuradhapura. As Daya Somasundaram states, "Anuradhapura also formed a transit point for soldiers either returning to service or going on leave, due to which the sex industry was a primary

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140 In Sri Lankan society a woman's honour is basically based on her 'purity'.

141 Yamuna Sangarasivam, "Militarizing the Feminine Body: Women's Participation in the Tamil Nationalist Struggle," in *Violence and the Body: Race, Gender, and the State*, ed. Arturo J. Aldama (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 60.

142 For a detailed description see, Bashana Abeywardane, "Athwaradeem Saha Samuha Gathana, [Mistakes and Massacres]" *Mawbima*, January 7, 2007.

form of employment for women …."[143] Even though women were treated as sex objects in both cases, the purpose was totally different. In the first case, raping Tamil women was a way of oppressing the Tamil community, but in the second case, rape was for the sexual pleasure of the soldiers. The main reason why Sinhala women worked in the sex industry was poverty. While the government spent millions of rupees on a civil war over a period of three decades, and politicians and other groups profited, millions of Sinhala people lived in utter poverty. The intention here is, however, not to justify women's involvement in the sex industry but to claim that the sex industry expanded due to war and increased opportunities for trafficking women to be employed in sex industry. Even though the results of war – trauma, insecurity, displacement, loss, pain, and desperation – are common to both men and women, in reality women's experiences differ from those of men; the experiences of Tamil women are dissimilar to those of the Sinhalese.

2.3 The Aftermath of War in SL

The ethno-national war between the GoSL and the LTTE ended with a massacre of innocent civilians in 2009. The real causes of the ethno-national conflict are not resolved, there is still no proper political solution that enables the Tamil nation and other minority communities in SL to live with dignity and self-determination. The minority communities, especially the Tamil communities, still do not have the freedom to make any decision with regard to a political solution that they think would be suitable for them. Instead, the majority of the country, the Sinhalese, decides everything for the minority, while allowing discriminatory policies to continue. Hence, even though the armed conflict is over, all the other forms of war that oppress the Tamils continue in the form of re-colonisation by the Sinhala-centric government. The strategy has changed, but the intent of 'colonisation' is ongoing.

The cost of the war has been immense. The conflict claimed thousands of lives of many people, mostly women and children. Many are displaced with many still missing; people have lost their loved ones

143 Daya Somasundaram, *Sacred Communities: Psychological Impact of Man-Made and Natural Disasters on Sri Lankan Society* (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2014), 384.

and the environmental destruction.[144] Even though all the ethno-nations and other ethnic communities in the country were affected by the war, the Tamils who lived in the North and East were the ones who suffered the brutality of the war and had to experience the massacre of thousands of Tamil men, women and children who were killed, disappeared, displaced and tortured, with many Tamil women raped.

According to the report of the Peoples' *Tribunal on Sri Lanka,* "[T]he construction of the Tamil population as alien to a unitary Sri Lankan state was a long process, which included legal and political decisions, as well as countless massacres, processes of discrimination, periods of armed conflict and finally the implementation of an exterminatory project."[145]

The former President Mahinda Rajapaksa at the ceremonial opening of Parliament in 2009, after the end of the war, said:

> We removed the word minorities from our vocabulary three years ago. No longer are there Tamils, Muslims, Burghers, Malays and any other minorities. There are only two peoples in the country. One is the people that love this country. The other comprises the small groups that have no love for the land of their birth.[146]

The statement of the former president is, however, duplicitous, as his regime did not only suppress the Tamils, but even the Sinhalese who elected him. Once the government 'won' the war, peace did not come automatically and so the government has to work for a sustainable peace. Therefore, unless the government addresses the root causes of the ethno-national war and finds a political solution to the ethno-national conflict of the country with the equal participation of the Tamil and Sinhala nations, there will be no sustainable peace in SL.

While the people of the country long for such a sustainable peace, the prevailing reality of the North, especially after the war, remains a matter of deep concern. In spite of some economic and infrastructural developments, the situation of the North can be characterised by realities of Sinhalisation, militarisation, land grabbing, state brutality, oppression of Tamil women, and Buddhistisation.

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144 Cf. Jane Derges, *Ritual and Recovery in Post-Conflict Sri Lanka*, 46.

145 *Peoples' Tribunal on Sri Lanka*, Bremen, 7-10 December 2013.

146 Mahinda Rajapaksa, "at the Ceremonial Opening of Parliament," Sri Jayewardenepura - Kotte, May 19, 2009: http://www.president.gov.lk/speech_New.php?Id=74 (accessed 12 March 2014).

2.3.1 Sinhalisation of the Tamil Traditional Homeland

In 1950, D.S. Senanayake, the first Prime Minister of SL, with the intention of colonising the Northern and Eastern parts of the country, started the Sinhala settlements of 'Gal Oya' in the East. Due to the state-aided Sinhala colonisation in traditional Tamil homelands, the Tamil FP leader Chelvanayakam asserted that the number of Tamils was slowly dwindling in their traditional land.[147] The rapid change in the demography of the Tamil areas was obvious and would certainly be a major issue in the future of the Tamils with regard to the Tamil vote for self-determination. Rajan Hoole states:

> Tourism and capitalisation of agriculture, coupled with militarisation with its goals of Sinhalisation, place a huge strain on resources and environmental viability.[148]

After 2009, having defeated the LTTE, the GoSL, instead of seeking a solution to the ethno-national conflict, runs the risk of Sinhalising the country in different ways, as happened previously through Sinhala Buddhist settlements in the North, creating Buddhist environments. Through her experience of journeying to the North after the war and seeing how the state tried to create a Buddhist atmosphere within the area, Kumaragamage states in her book *Ureippu Sappada, Noasu Kan Walata* [For the Ears the Haven't Head]:

> ... why do we make such an effort [erecting the statues of the Buddha] to prove to ourselves that we are Buddhists, and to show it to others? Is it because we ourselves feel that we do not own the real Buddhist qualities within ourselves? Or is it because we doubt our own Buddhistness? Perhaps are we trying to forget something by hiding behind these exhibitions or do we have a need to cover up the whole thing from the others? If we live according to the teachings of the Buddha, and our friendly ways are a sign of that kindness preached by him, it is not necessary to make it known to others by making a big noise. If so, why so much trouble to express that we are Buddhists?[149]

Since 2009 the GoSL has begun the process of Sinhalising the Tamil traditional homeland like never before.

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147 Cf. A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism* (London: Hurst and Company, 1994), 36.

148 Rajan Hoole, *Palmyra Fallen,* 293.

149 Kumari Kumaragamage, *Ureippu Sappada*, *Noasu Kan Walata* [*For the Ears the Haven't Heard*] (Colombo: Neo Graphics, 2010), ix.

2.3.2 Post-War Militarisation

The report on the Situation of the North and East of SL, which was tabled in Parliament on Friday October 21, 2011 by Sumanthiran, a member of parliament (MP) on behalf of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) reads:

> Out of a total landmass of 65,619 sq km, Tamil people inhabited 18,880 sq km of land in the North and East, but after May 2009, the defence forces have occupied more than 7,000 sq km of land owned by Tamil people. There is one member of the armed forces for approximately every ten civilians in the Jaffna Peninsula. The heavy presence of the military continues to be the most serious concern in the North and East.[150]

Although the GoSL removed some checkpoints, the militarisation of civil and public spheres continues in the North even several years after the end of the ethno-national war. It is obvious that militarisation goes hand in hand with Sinhalisation by the creation of a Sinhala Buddhist environment in the North, dispute settlements and intrusions into private and public life.[151] This is the strategy of the GoSL to destroy the identity of the Tamil nation in the North and East. Militarisation has a negative impact on women's security; the lives of war-widows are especially threatened in the absence of their husbands. The Tamil survivors of the war, who are struggling to overcome their unhealed memories of the war, have to live with the presence of the military, the victims have to live seeing their perpetrators daily, the victims of sexual violations, something which poses a challenge in the post-war situation.

The presence of the soldiers not only wounds the psychology of the people, but also has become an economic threat to the Tamils in the area. The military has taken over local economic activities like agriculture and the running of shops and cafés in the North, negatively effecting small-scale businessmen/women in the area. The fact that begs more attention is that many positions in civil administration are given to former military men – for example, the governor of the Northern Province was a former

150 M.A. Sumanthiran, "Situation in North-Easter Sri Lanka: A series of serious concerns": http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/2759 (accessed 13 November 2013).

151 Cf. "The Report of the Women's Action Network 2012": www.lanka.advocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/WAN_Geneva_03 (accessed 22 October 2013). This is a network consisting of eleven women's organisations based in the North and East of Sri Lanka and this is the report that they submitted for the Universal Periodic Review in 2012.

commander of the Jaffna security forces until 2015 and the Eastern province governor was the former Navy chief of staff until 2015. The Tamil areas are occupied mainly by the present and former military forces, while the freedom of the Tamil society is restricted.

The former Sri Lankan President, Mahinda Rajapaksa addressing the twenty third convocation ceremony in one of the Defence Universities in SL said, that "[T]here are demands that we remove the troops from the North. This is not a practical thing to do and it will not to be done."[152] No matter how much pressure was exerted by local or international communities, the former president of the country viewed militarisation as an important factor in the post-war scenario. Sinhala-centric governments that came to power after the independence perceive the country only from the perspective of the Sinhala Buddhist national ideology and not from the perspective of the oppressed Tamil nation.

2.3.3 Land Grabbing in the North and East

The occupation of the land that belongs to the Tamils in the Northern and Eastern provinces, by the armed forces during and after the ethno-national war, is a significant problem.[153] One of the election promises of the present GoSL (since 2015) was to release lands that are forcibly occupied by the armed forces in the North and East, but the problem remains, because of which some of the Tamils still live in internally displaced people camps (IDP camps). One of the reasons presented by the authorities is that the ownership of the lands cannot be claimed as the people do not have the legal documents of ownership. The fact is that even those who have the legal documents to prove the ownership of lands still struggle in order to get the armed forces to release their properties to them.

Nirmanusan Balasundaram mentions that "out of a total land mass of 65,619 sq km, the Tamils inhabited 18,880 sq kms of land in the North and East, but after May 2009, the Sri Lankan Armed Forces have come to occupy more than 7,000 sq kms of Tamil land."[154] Many Tamil-owned lands have been declared 'high security zones'.

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152 "Removal of Army Camps from Sri Lanka's North": http://www.colombopage.com/archive_13B/Oct29_1383067520CH.php (accessed 29 October 2013).

153 Cf. Trevor Grant, *Sri Lanka's Secrets: How the Rajapaksa Regime Gets away with Murder* (Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2014), 221-224.

154 "Sri Lanka: The Intentions behind the Land Grabbing Process": www.jdslanka.org/index.php/2012-01-30-09-31-17/politics-a-econ (accessed 25 October 2013).

2.3.4 State Brutality

The people in the North and the East have faced threats to their safety, especially over the past few years under the regime of former president Rajapaksa. The GoSL declared the end of war in 2009, proclaiming the defeat of the LTTE. However, even after the war ended Tamils were arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) that is in existence since 1979. The Women's Action Network had been informed of ten women (including a teenage girl) being held in custody under this PTA.[155] For example, Jeyakumari Balendran (fifty one years old), a widow who lost her two sons in the war was arrested with her thirteen-year-old daughter in Vanni under the PTA. She was detained for being outspoken, for organising public campaigns on behalf of the forcibly disappeared, including her fifteen-year-old son.[156]

Nimalaruban and Dilrukshan were arrested as terrorists in 2009, months after the end of the war. Dilrukshan died in 2012 after being in a coma and the body of Nimalaruban who had been in the custody of the GoSL was found in a hospital. His chest was bloodied and injured; his hands and legs were broken. The following are the words of his mother at his funeral:

> In which article of law is it written that you may beat a person to death? Where? I am not afraid of any mortal …. The people who beat my son are beasts. My heart burns …. If my child had done wrong, he should have been charged in court and punished. But what law has decreed that my child must be tortured and killed? My son was killed in secret by cowards who must remain anonymous....[157]

In the aftermath of war, swathes of Northern and Eastern SL were gripped by a fear of elusive nocturnal prowlers who frequented rural areas, attacking especially women. The elusive intruders who were known as 'grease devils' were considered to be some kind of government plot used as poltergeists to create panic among the civilian population. They went into several houses and indiscriminately beat up men, women and boys.[158]

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155 Women's Action Network, "Continuing Detention of Tamil Women and a Girl Child under PTA": https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/continuing-detention-of-tamil-women-and-a-girl-child-under-pta/ (accessed 13 August 2015).

156 Cf. Rajan Hoole, *Palmyra Fallen*, 248.

157 Ibid., 191.

158 Daya Somasundaram, *Sacred Communities*, 374.

In some places security forces were blamed for launching and even fostering these 'grease devil'. However, the Supreme Court dismissed many petitions due to pressure from the government. In speaking of another aspect of harassment, MP Sumanthiran states:

> Former LTTE cadres are threatened by the army to reveal the identity of those who supported the LTTE. In fear or panic, these former cadres identify individuals with no links to the LTTE, merely to stop being questioned by the army. The newly identified family is then subjected to harassment by the Army. Thus, people in these communities have lost trust in one another as they do not know which of their neighbours is an informer of the police or army. This has led to deep suspicion, destroying close-knit relationships within the community.[159]

With all this state brutality, the aim of the government has been; (1) to oppress the rights of the Tamils; and (2) to destroy unity within the Tamil community, just as the British did: 'divide and rule'.

2.3.5 Oppression of Women

Tamil women face enormous challenges due to militarisation, sexual harassments, unemployment, issues over land rights, security, unhealed memories, rituals of traditions, religious and cultural customs. They are marginalised by the GoSL and sometimes by their own community in the North and the East. They do not have the means to express their grievances and to make official complaints when faced with harassment, because most of the officials are Sinhalese appointed by the GoSL, some being former officers of armed forces.

In addition to the above mentioned violations, women also suffer hidden violations – forced marriage, prostitution, forced contraception and sterilisation – to which many women do not openly admit, due to social, cultural and religious taboos. Compared to the Sinhala women, many Tamil women have to face gender-based violations by the state because of their identity as a 'minority' and 'enemy'. As Kumari Jayawardena states, in post-conflict it is essential to be vigilant, as "in conflict situations and anti-colonial struggles, patriarchy breaks down a bit, sometimes quite a lot. Women are in battle dress, carrying bombs, and are even suicide bombers. They also do a host of 'unwomanly' things and even become empowered as

159 M.A. Sumanthiran, "Situation in North-Eastern Sri Lanka: A Series of Serious Concerns": http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/2759 (accessed 13 November 2013).

heads of the household."[160] It is clear that during the war all 'unwomanly' actions became accepted as normal but in the post-war context there has been a tendency to confine women to their homes, to be daughters and wives in traditional patriarchal family structures. The most crucial aspect of the patriarchal perception of women who were actively engaged in war is that after the war the general feeling is that 'women must be chaste', and "these girls have been in the army and we can't vouch for them", and "they have been carrying guns and will be a menace."[161] The situation of women in the aftermath of the war is therefore a defining moment: to be a victim of a patriarchy or an agent against the unjust violence against women.

Several of the women who are struggling to get back to normalcy after the war are female ex-combatants. The women suffered different kinds of oppression in the name of the government's 'rehabilitation' programme. Dushiyanthini Kanagasabastianpillai states:

> While the Tamil community took pride in and praised these women decades ago, it now refuses to provide a helping hand to them in their hour of need. They still fear for their lives: they are verbally and emotionally stamped upon, leading them to fear that the 'Tamil Tiger' label will be stuck with them forever. They face a tough time returning to civilian life, with fewer prospects for education, employment and marriage due to the prevailing social stigma. They suffer silently. They are dismayed and demoralised.[162]

These Tamil ex-combatants are marginalised and abandoned not only by the government and the Sinhalese but also by their own people. Sometimes even Tamils consider the female ex-combatants to be prostitutes who have had illicit relationships with the security forces during their rehabilitation. Some people do not want to give them any work since they are ex-combatants; some men do not wish to marry those women thinking that it will not easy to 'control' them. These women, who were severely affected by the armed war, are now affected by another war for survival.

Regarding the present reality of the Tamils in the country, Elil Rajan states how "[T]he GOSL is working on the hypothesis that economic development will take care of minority issues without addressing any core

160 Kumari Jayawadena, quoted by Wenona Giles, "The Women's Movement in Sri Lanka: An Interview with Kumari Jayawadena," 208.

161 Ibid., 208.

162 Dushiyanthini Kanagasebastianpillai, "Post-War Sri Lanka Denies Rights of Women Ex-Combatant," *Ethics in Action* 7, no.1 (February 2013): 25.

issues as to why there was an insurgence which became violent to the extent that Tamil youth took up arms against their government."[163]

2.4 International Intervention in SL

> The Tamil accusations – of discrimination, denial of the rights to self-determination, abrogated agreements and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law amounting to genocide by successive Sri Lanka governments – are supported by specific evidence given by international human rights and legal experts, international human rights non-governmental organisations and other relevant entities.[164]

The GoSL bears responsibility for the crimes committed during the last stages of the war. The last five months of the war between the GoSL and the LTTE have become a controversial issue. Having visited the country in 2009, the former Secretary General of the UN emphasised the importance of accountability regarding the violations that took place during the last stage of the war. The report of the Secretary General's Panel of Experts in 2011 clearly states that violence was committed by the GoSL and the LTTE. The following are the accusations against the government: (1) The killing of civilians through widespread shelling; (2) The shelling of hospitals and humanitarian objects; (3) The denial of humanitarian assistance; (4) Human rights violations suffered by victims and survivors of the conflict, including both IDPs [Internally Displaced People] and suspected LTTE cadre; and (5) Human rights violations outside the conflict zone, including against the media and other critics of the government. Their claims against the LTTE were; (1) Using civilians as a human buffer; (2) Killing civilians attempting to flee LTTE control; (3) Using military equipment in the proximity of civilians; (4) The forced recruitment of children; (5) Forced labour; and (6) The killing of civilians through suicide attacks.[165]

After the former Secretary General of the UN strongly emphasised the accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and human

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163 Elil Rajan Rajendram, "Post-Transitional Justice in Sri Lanka," *Vagdevi* 7, no. 2 (July 2013): 20.

164 Deirdre McConnell, "The Tamil People's Right to Self-Determination": http://www.sangam.org/2008/12/Right_Self_Determination.php?print=true (accessed 12 October 2015).

165 The Report of the Secretary General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka, 31 March 2011. www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri_Lanka/POE_Report_Full.pdf (accessed 26 October 2013).

rights law, the GoSL established the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) in 2011 in order to investigate the allegations, to start with the Ceasefire Agreement in 2002 and up and until the end of the war in 2009. The government strongly rejected the international interventions to investigate the latter part of the war. The report given by the LLRC in 2012 has challenged the GoSL on a number of issues and has made some significant recommendations towards reconciliation, but it has not sought to investigate systematically and impartially the allegations of serious human rights violations committed during the war.

Navanethem Pillay, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) in 2013, after meeting the victims of war, civil society representatives, local authorities and the opposition party, being aware of the real situation of the war-affected people, stated that her main concerns were the extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, militarisation and land grabs by the GoSL. In addition, Pillay unapologetically described the state of democracy in SL as: "...the country is increasingly becoming an authoritarian state, despite the end of its civil war four years ago."[166] Even though a new government was elected in 2015, the situation of the country has not changed as was expected before the elections. Deirdre McConnell in speaking about the change of GoSL says:

> There has been a change of government, but the real underlying injustices are still as firmly in place as ever. Messages and speeches for international consumption are cleverly constructed to give a cosmetic image of real change. But nothing could be further from the truth. It was the Tamils in the North and East firmly supporting the new President, who were the 'kingmakers' ensuring his success. Without them he couldn't have become President. They were hoping for real change. Yet there was nothing in Sirisena's election pledges about their future at all. Despite Sri Lanka saying in international forums for decades that "the government is working on a political solution for the Tamils" no fruit has ever been produced.[167]

The strategy of the GoSL was to move towards a domestic investigation into crimes committed and accountability for human rights violations while deliberately ignoring the Tamils' demand for an

166 "Navi Pillay Lashes Back at Sri Lankan Claim," *Daily Mirror*, 21 September 2013.

167 Deirdre McConnell, "Change But Not Change in Sri Lanka": https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/change-but-no-change-in-sri-lanka/ (accessed 25 November 2015).

international independent investigation. The UNHCR Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein, summing up the findings of the Investigation on SL report at the UNHCR, said:[168]

> The recommendation is for a 'Hybrid mechanism' …the 'change' in the political environment is the reason for OHCHR abandoning the independent international investigation mechanism that had been recommended on many occasions by his predecessor Ms Navanetham Pillay.[169]

The Expert Panel Report of the UN that recommended an international investigation into war crimes has been thrown away by the USA ignoring the reports and their recommendations. The USA's call for an independent international investigation favoured during the regime of Mahinda Rajapaksa has suddenly come to a halt with the GoSL's change. The GoSL is now moving towards a domestic mechanism to deal with issues of accountability for human rights violations in SL. Sri Lanka's incumbent President, Maithreepala Sirisena (since 2015) gave an absolute guarantee to the Sinhalese that the rights or lives of the Sinhala soldiers would be protected. Hence, many Tamil activists have this observation to make:

> 'Hybrid mechanism' missing mandate for genocide investigation is the new way for buying 'time and space'. If the universal process of justice could be dictated by local political changes, then there is no independency or universality in the UN justice mechanism.[170]

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168 The summary of the Report reads: This report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 25/1, and includes the principal findings of OHCHR's comprehensive investigation into alleged serious violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes during the armed conflict in SL. It also reviews human rights related developments in the country since March 2014, in particular the reforms and steps towards accountability and reconciliation by the new President elected in January 2015 and Government in August 2015. The report concludes with the High Commissioner's recommendations on the way forward, including the establishment of a hybrid special court to try war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed by all parties to the armed conflict.

169 Tamil Net, "Genocide not Recognized, 'Hybrid mechanism' recommended to drag on": http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=37930 (accessed 15 September 2015).

170 Tamil Net, "Genocide Not Recognized, 'Hybrid Mechanism' Recommended to Drag on": http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=37930 (accessed 16 September 2015).

Moreover, citing its consistent warnings to Tamils about the use of their struggle in geo-political contestations, the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF), launched as a breakaway faction of the TNA, said in a statement that it insists on an international criminal justice process since any domestic process will be tantamount to 'victor's justice'.[171]

It is clear that in the present post-war nation-(un)making process of the country, especially in the North and East, the Tamils are still facing discriminatory violence. The results of war – trauma, insecurity, displacement, loss, pain, and desperation – are common to both men and women and also varies from person to person not only because of one's sex, but also because of one's physical, psychological, economic, political and cultural situation. Widows are a major group of people among war-affected people in SL, not just because of their vulnerability but also because of their response to the new situation in the aftermath of the war. Studying the situation of war-widows in SL is therefore of particular importance.

3. The War-Widows in SL

As Nira Wickramasinghe indicates, female-headed households emerged in SL due to the deaths of husbands as a significant social phenomenon after two types of wars.[172] In SL women were widowed due to: (1) the three-decade long war between the GoSL and the LTTE (mainly Sinhalese and Tamils); and due to (2) the armed struggle conducted by JVP in 1971 (the struggle began in April, 1971 and lasted until June 1971) and again in 1987, that lasted until 1989 with the movement resorting to attacks on civilian and military targets. According to the data released by the Department of Census and Statistics (2009/2010), 1.1 million households are female-headed families and 50 percent of these women are widows.[173]

Since SL is a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country, the contextualisation of widows is a complex issue. Given the political, economic and cultural scenarios, being a widow in the Sinhala community is different from being one in the Tamil community; being a widow whose husband was on the side of the GoSL is different from being a widow whose husband was against the GoSL.

171 Cf. "Domestic Process will be Tantamount to "Victor's Justice": TNPF: http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=37906 (accessed 16 September 2015).

172 Cf. Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age,* 334.

173 Cf. *The Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka* (2009/2010).

The Widows of the Ethno-National War

A large number of Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim women were widowed following the war between the GoSL and the LTTE (1983-2009). The Deputy Minister for Women's Affairs and Child Development (2010-2013), M.L.A.M. Hizbullah in 2009, announced "that he had a list of 89,000 war-widows – 49,000 in the Eastern Province and 40,000 in the Northern Province whose husbands had died or had disappeared during the conflict. Among them were 12,000 below the age of fourty and 8,000 who had at least three children."[174] It is also important to mention another group of women who became widows due to the conflict. Since 2005, some Sinhala and Tamil journalists who were publicly critical of the ethno-national conflict were killed and as a result their wives became widows.

Since 1990 until the end of the war, Tamils were the only ethno-national group living in the North, whereas in the East there were Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese. As a result, all the war-widows in the North are Tamils and the war-widows in the East belong to either Tamil, Muslim or Sinhala communities. In the South, all the widows are Sinhalese. These widows are not a homogenous group – some of the Tamil widows were active members, combatants of the LTTE, workers or helpers of the LTTE, and some of them were housewives. Similarly, many Sinhala widows are wives of members of military forces, women who were mainly involved in office work and nursing, some being victims of the LTTE attacks and suicide bombings, which caused severe damage in the Southern part of the country. Even though Muslims were not directly involved in the war, as they live mainly in the Eastern part of the country, they also became victims of the war between the GoSL and the LTTE.

The war produced many families that became female-headed households, with many widows becoming the breadwinners of their families and the main decision-makers, something quite new to Sri Lankan culture.[175] This transformation from being a house wife to being the female head of the household meant participating in a dynamic labour market –

174 M.L.A.M. Hizbullah, Daily Mirror: http://www.dailymirror.lk/6838/890 (accessed 20 November 2016).
In terms of statistics regarding the number of Sinhala war- widows is not available for public access, due to which the number of women being widowed among Sinhalese cannot be mentioned.

175 Cf. Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age,* 334-335.

with some engaged in jobs such as land-mine clearing, fishing, working in hotels, and road mending and construction, labour almost unknown to women, especially Tamils – thus moving away from certain cultural norms and customs. Some even remarried in spite of cultural restrictions.

Despite political, economic and cultural differences, some widows on both sides – North and South – recognise a common ground where they can stand together, where they can have a forum to stand up for their rights and equal citizenship – for example, The Association of Mothers of Missing Youth, Mothers' Front, The Association of Mothers and Daughters in SL, Mothers and Wives of the Disappeared.[176]

In order to understand the reality of war-widows in SL it helps to study the generational cultural and religious customs, rituals and perceptions in the country regarding widows. There is no doubt that widowhood is stigmatised in Sri Lankan society. Hence, we will examine the perception of widows in both Tamil and Sinhala cultures in SL, both of which have a long history.

4. The Cultural Perception of Widows in Tamil and Sinhala Communities

> 'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with a suitable historic past.[177]

Since SL is a patriarchal society, the situation of women is very often secondary to men's, as a result of which women are oppressed in society. When women become widows they are not only oppressed by the men through oppressive rules and customs, but also by other women who attach a stigma to widowhood.

The relationship between SL and India is more than 2000 years old.[178] The two countries have built upon a legacy of cultural, religious and linguistic intimacy, which can be called 'Indic'. SL and the subcontinent

176 Cf. Neloufer de Mel, *Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 233-239.

177 Janaki Jayawardena, "Cultural Construction of the 'Sinhala Woman' and Women's Resistance to Such Identities," *Nivedini: Journal of Gender Studies* 12, no. 1 (July/August 2006): 84.

178 Cf. The Library Congress, "Sri Lanka – Historical and Cultural Heritage": http://www.infolanka.com/org/srilanka/hist/hist2.html (accessed 20 December 2014).

formed one single but heterogeneous socio-cultural unit. As a result, the social, religious, cultural and political situation in SL is highly shaped by the neighbouring country, India. The social construction of gender is also vastly shaped by the experiences of women and men in India. Colonisation played a major role in the situation of women and men in religion and culture, as Janaki Jayawardena argues, "the colonial ideology based on Christian values and male colonial officers' perception was compatible with the view of women depicted in the nationalist ideology and this also had a strong impact on shaping women's situation in contemporary Sri Lanka."[179]

Culture and religion are two inter-connected elements that affect people in society. Culture is a way of life, with shared norms, values and beliefs as its key elements. "The origin of culture lies to a certain extent in the life experiences of the people and their specific and unique history."[180] It is not incorrect to claim that culture is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, culture gives a community its identity, but on the other hand it is used as a means to justify oppression or suppression of people, especially women. In Sri Lankan society, many women have accepted their culturally ascribed sex role as natural. For example, "sex-stereotyping of occupations or the acceptance of some occupations as suitable only for the females and others only for males still persists."[181] Also, the roles of wife and husband are clearly defined. Woman as a wife and/or a mother has a subordinate role in family life.

However, with urbanisation, industrialisation, development in education, the women of SL have been provided with new opportunities in all spheres of society. Understanding the nature of the struggle the war-widows go through as a result of this, is essential for this study. This section will mainly deal with the cultural perception of widows in the Tamil and Sinhala communities, as the present thesis focuses on the struggles of war-widows from both sides, Sinhalese and Tamil.

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179 Janaki Jayawardena, "Cultural Construction of the 'Sinhala Woman' and Women's Resistance to Such Identities," 85.

180 Sri Lanka Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *A Special Publication on the Status of Women for International Women's Year* (Colombo: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1975), 27.

181 Ibid., 27.

4.1 Cultural Perception of Widows in Tamil Communities in SL

In Hindu tradition, Manu is the legendary author of the Sanskrit law code of Manu, a legal text from ancient India (about 100 CE). The law code of Manu (*Manusmṛti*) and its influence still remains strong on women in India and other societies that are influenced by the 'Indic' cultural, religious and linguistic situation. To quote a verse:

> After her husband is dead, she may voluntarily emaciate her body by eating pure flowers, root, and fruits; but she must never mention even the name of another man. Aspiring to that unsurpassed law of women devoted to a single husband, she should remain patient, controlled, and celibate until her death.[182]

Sri Lankan society is male centred. The patriarchal nature of Sri Lankan society, which is so embedded in its history is also deeply ingrained by the view on marriage as a social institution in which women or wives are secondary to men or husbands. Even though the women carry the burden of running the family, the inferiority of women to men is also a common reality in Tamil society where men are considered superior to women. The subordinate position of women is based on the sexuality of women. This negative or anti-women ideology is emphasised in 'the *Manudharmaśāstra* or the *Manusmṛti*',[183] the original legal text of Hinduism. It says that "[D]ay and night men should keep their women from acting independently; for, attached as they are to sensual pleasures, men should keep them under their control ...."[184] "Though he [the husband] may be bereft of virtue, given to lust, and totally devoid of good qualities, a good woman should always worship her husband like a god."[185]

It is also important to mention that there were/are some anti-Brahmanic movements led by men alongside the various kinds of women's movements in India that challenged/challenge discrimination against women in society. For example, an Indian social activist and politician, Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy's Self Respect Movement (*Suyamariyathai Iyakkam* – 1926) or the Dravidian Movement, which was the result of his awareness of numerous incidents of caste and gender discrimination,

182 The *Manusmṛti*; v: 157-158.

183 According to the Hindu mythology, the *Manusmṛti* is the word of Brahma. This scripture consists of 2690 verses in 12 chapters.

184 *The Manusmṛti*; ix: 2.

185 *The Manusmṛti*; v: 154.

got the following resolutions passed in the *Suyamariyathai* Conference, the conference of the Self-Respect Movement of Madras Presidency at Chingleput in 1929:

> The girls below sixteen should not be given in marriage; the girls should have the right to abrogate the marriage arrangement; widow remarriage must be encouraged; both men and women should be allowed to choose their life-partners irrespective of their caste and religion and the marriage ceremonies should be reformed to suit these aims.[186]

Ramaswami's analysis of the concept of *Karpu* (chastity) is important as he notes that chastity is not being insisted upon for men. He considers it to be an evil for man to enslave woman. Hence, he articulates that "the idea that chastity is a must for women and need not be emphasised for men is the outcome of the institution of private property. The existing condition of women is that she is considered as the property of a man."[187] Therefore, Ramaswamy states that if women want to achieve real liberation, they should discard this concept of *nirbanda karpu* (imposed chastity) and should undertake *suyetchai karpu* (voluntary chastity).[188] Though on the one side there is discrimination against women in Indian society, the unjust social system that discriminates against women also meets resistance from both men and women. It is with this understanding of the social and cultural reality that we have to approach the reality of widows in Tamil community.

The Tamil word for widow, *vithavai*, is considered offensive and evokes an image of inferiority, compared to *sumangali*, a married woman living with children. The cultural perception of widows in Tamil community is based on a set of inter-related factors: socio-economic and religious factors – Hinduism, the dominant religion of Tamils, and Christianity – regional cultural influences, various ideological perceptions of women, caste and class ideologies. In studying widows in the Tamil community, it is important to note that belonging to the same ethnicity does not mean that the situation is identical for everyone who belongs to the same community, because the sub-cultural system of those communities has a significant effect on people's lives. Hence, the situation of widows needs to be viewed and analysed in its totality.

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186 B.S. Chandrababu and L. Thilagavathi, *Woman: Her History and Her Struggle for Emancipation* (Chennai: Bharathi Puthakalayam, 2009), 298.

187 Ibid., 300.

188 Cf. Ibid., 300.

Thiruchandran claims, "[R]ituals of all religions insisted that the man takes ownership of the woman/wife's sexuality within the wedlock and become the one who possesses her body."[189] For example, at a Hindu wedding, the rites and rituals exhibit the subordinate position of the bride. In the rite of garlanding and exchanging the garlands, the bride has to stand up, whereas the bridegroom remains in a sitting posture. One of the other rituals of the Hindu wedding is that of stepping on the grindstone – the bridegroom takes the bride's feet one by one and places them on the stone and then puts the toe-ring on her toe. This ritual comes from a historical myth, which indicates the fallen status of Ahalya, a wife of a great sage who was turned into a stone due to her infidelity to her husband.[190] The grindstone, placed near the seat of the marriage couple reminds the bride of the repercussions of being unfaithful to her husband as in the example of Ahalya. The toe-ring signifies the 'principle of an utmost and complete chastity'.[191]

All these rituals and customs insinuate the inferior status of women, especially given the fact that there are no rituals or moral codes for insisting on male chastity. Also in Hinduism most of the fasting rituals have to be carried out by women to fulfil the requirements of "the responsibilities to make a home blissful, prosperous and trouble free."[192] Furthermore, there are festivals in which married women are expected to observe fasting for the welfare and the longevity of their husbands. It is clear that not only in social life but also in family life women are treated as subordinates by their male partners as a result of the social, cultural and religious rituals and

189 Selvy Thiruchandran, *The Other Victims of War: Emergence of Female Headed Households in Sri Lanka*, vol. II (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1999), 55.

190 Ahalya was the wife of Gautam rishi and the daughter of Brahma. Since she was very beautiful, Indra had his eye upon her and was waiting for an opportunity to sexually enjoy with her. According to one version, Ahalya succumbed to him with her consent and the other version claims Indra assuming the exact appearance of Gautam rishi and sexually enjoying Ahalya. However, Gautam rishi cursed his wife Ahalya to be turned to stone. Here the idea of rishi was that even though Indra assumed the exact appearance of him, Ahalya as his wife should have recognised her own husband. Cf. Akhileshwar Jha, *Sexual Designs in Indian Culture* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1979), 24.

191 Cf. Selvy Thiruchandran, *Patriarchal World View of Hinduism in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Women's Education and Research Centre, 2012), 4.

192 Ibid., 2.

customs. In the view of Thiruchandran, "[I]ntense and continuous patience in the face of marital suffering is part of virtues as an extension of the concept of chastity and fidelity."[193]

Since there is a pre-existing discrimination against women, a woman suffers various kinds of further discrimination when she is widowed. As it is stated in the *Mahābhārata*, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India, "a widow is pounced by the wicked like a piece of flesh by the birds of prey."[194]

4.1.1 Widowhood and Inauspiciousness in the Tamil Community in SL

In Tamil culture women are often cast in terms of opposites, for instance, *shakthi* (strength, power, and vitality arising in women from chastity) and the weaker sex, auspicious (auspicious=bring good luck; inauspicious=presaging ill-fortune) and polluted, godly as a mother and also as an evil force. House warming, coming of age and weddings are some of the auspicious events in Tamil culture. The *tali*[195], *pottu*[196] (mark on the forehead) and flowers are some of the symbols of being auspicious (*sumankali*). In a special way, the *tali* and *pottu* signify active sexuality, fertility and marital auspiciousness. The ornaments, flowers and colourful sarees give additional beauty to femininity especially in Tamil culture. In contrast, death, sickness, widowhood and barrenness in women are inauspicious, and as a result, the auspicious symbols are taboo for widows.

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193 Selvy Thiruchandran, *Women's Movement in Sri Lanka: History, Trends and Trajectories* (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 2012), 27.

194 As quoted in Jeanette Pinto, *The Indian Widow: From Victim to Victor* (Bombay: Better Yourself Books, 2003), 42.

195 This is an ornament made out of gold according to appropriate rites. The bridegroom knots the chain round the neck of the bride. This is the culmination of the marriage rites by which bride and groom are pronounced as husband and wife. The *tali* makes the woman an auspicious person and the wearer of of *tali* announces to the world that she is married and she is within boundaries of chastity and subjected to a restrictive behaviour, with restraint and limitations such as husband, children and home. Cf. Selvy Thiruchandran, *Patriarchal World View of Hinduism in Sri Lanka*, 50.

196 This is a religious symbol. For women the red *pottu* has an additional significance, suggesting that she is married. The red powder called *kunkumam* from which the *pottu* is made is placed ritually on the forehead of the bride by the bridegroom. *Tali* and *Kunkumam* are the symbols of married life. Cf. Selvy Thiruchandran, *Patriarchal World View of Hinduism in Sri Lanka*, 49.

When a woman loses her husband, her life begins to be affected by different kinds of social, cultural and religious customs, rituals and taboos. The absence or death of the man leaves the woman to face two main painful situations. Firstly, a woman becomes vulnerable and secondly she often becomes subject to gossip, ridicule or suspicion: "[H]er singleness is easily interpreted as being available."[197] Remarriage is generally not an option for widows; they are subjected to an oppressive socialisation where sexual relationships or entering into a new partnership becomes a taboo or is socially undesirable. Under the constant, vigilant public eye the women are expected to abide by cultural rituals and customs, to control their sexuality conform the patriarchal ideology. Women are expected to remain modest and loyal and to maintain their 'identity' as widows.

A woman becomes a widow on the third day after the death of her husband, when the *tali* is taken off of her by the nearest female relation.[198] Henceforth, she is pronounced ritually inauspicious and she is considered a bad omen, unlucky and believed to bring about unhappiness to others. She is kept away from auspicious events and ceremonies. Thiruchandran speaks of four kinds of experiences that widows have to undergo, namely physical seclusion, verbal abuse, a strict code of dress and behaviour and the mechanism of social control exercised through gossip.[199] Widows have to renounce sex and other pleasures, dress and speech because there is a triple code [behaviour, dress and speech] of ethics, which governs them. These customs of widowhood were mainly practised by the Brahmins and later by members of the other castes as a way to improve their social status. "The ritualised patterns of widowhood which symbolised a negation of sexuality and world rejection and which became high caste norms during the latter periods of history had its beginning in the *Dharmaśāstra* [the ancient sacred law books of Hindus]."[200]

As mentioned earlier, widows are considered inauspicious in Tamil culture as a result of which they are not allowed to partake in auspicious events such as puberty ceremonies and weddings. As Thiruchandran

197 Selvy Thiruchandran, *The Other Victims of War,* 55.

198 Cf. Simon Casie Chitty, *The Castes, Customs, Manners and Literature of the Tamils* (New Delhi and Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1992), 122.

199 Cf. Selvy Thiruchandran, *The Other Victims of War*, 76.

200 Selvy Thiruchandran, *The Spectrum of Femininity: A Process of Deconstruction* (Colombo: Karunaratne & Sons Ltd, 1998), 7.

states, "these sanctions are religiously instituted and usually socially not violated."[201] Thus, widows are avoided, secluded, excluded and marginalised from all life cycles. The other aspect of the above mentioned practices such as the dress code – giving up ornaments, jewellery, decorations – giving up rich food, avoiding auspicious ceremonies, is that it marks the woman as a widow and these deprivations diminish her sexual attractiveness. The absence of a husband is not only a personal loss but it also exposes women to public inspection.

Verbal abuse is another painful experience widows have to face. Sometimes villagers refer to widows as *vithavai* (widow) or *arutali* (one whose *tali* is broken) or *purusani tintane* (you who have eaten your husband). Since these widows are religiously and socially excluded from auspicious moments, the women whose husbands are alive sometimes treat them unfairly.

4.1.2 Remarriage of Widows in Tamil Community in SL

The principle of *Dharmaśāstra* forbids widows to remarry. According to Manu, the foremost lawgiver in Hinduism, the union between a man and woman is the most unbreakable tie, so that it continues even after the death of one of the partners. He states, "let mutual fidelity continue till death; this may be considered as the gist of the highest law for the husband and the wife."[202] He therefore affirms that "a widow must not cohabit with any other man except her husband; for they who appoint her to another man violate the eternal law."[203] There are three reasons for Manu to prohibit widow-remarriage: (1) He felt it would lower the moral standard of women; (2) If women moved from one family to another it would pose problems regarding property; and (3) Male selfishness.[204]

Among the Tamils in SL the remarriage of widows is neither socially nor legally prohibited. Furthermore, the *Tesawalamai*, the customary laws of the Tamils in Jaffna permit the remarriage of widows.[205] The reason for

201 Selvy Thiruchandran, *Patriarchal World View of Hinduism in Sri Lanka,* 16.

202 As quoted by Jeanette Pinto, *The Indian Widow*, 30.

203 Ibid., 37.

204 Cf. Ibid., 32-33.

205 Tesawalamai is a collection of the customs of the Tamils in Jaffna pertaining to inheritance, property rights, dowry, adoption laws etc. It was codified by the Dutch in 1906. There are different positive and negative arguments about the position of women in *Tesawalamai* law.

this is that the "Sanskritisation process in the North did not bring about the Brahmanical values which particularly affect women. The imitation of the values of the higher caste or the infiltration of hegemonic Brahmanical Hinduism did not happen in the way it did in South India where Brahmins held superior positions socially, ritually and economically."[206] However, the social constructions made by men have come with various ideologies regarding remarriage, effecting women in a special way. In studying this social phenomenon of the remarriage of widows in the Sri Lankan Tamil cultural milieu, Katharina Thurnheer states, "a widow's remarriage tended to be more complicated than that of a widower … widows moreover risked moral condemnation when they attempted to marry …"[207]

Many women who grew up Tamil, have internalised different kinds of cultural values, ideas and views about a chaste or a virtuous wife through the socialisation process and through education. Two main ideologies that women have internalised are 'one man in our life' and the motherhood ideology.[208] These ideologies are historically constructed by chaste epic women like *Sita* and *Kannaki* who remained faithful to their husbands amidst all the afflictions in their lives.[209] There are innumerable religious and literary texts written by Brahmins to illustrate the virtues of the noble chastity of women. It is worth mentioning that Tamil literary productions, especially *Tolkapiyar* of the Sangam period (1059) classify three types of chaste women: (1) Chastity of the highest order falls on a woman who dies instantaneously and voluntarily with her husband either on hearing or realising that her husband has died (*mutanantam*); (2) Committing *sati* or widow burning (*purankatu*) – self-immolation at the cemetery;

206 Selvy Thiruchandran, "The Social Implications of Tecawalamai and Their Relevance to the Status of Women in Jaffna," *Nivedini: A Sri Lankan Feminist Journal* 2, no. 1 (July 1994): 85.

207 Katharina Thurnheer, *Life beyond Survival: Social Forms of Coping after the Tsunami in War-Affected Eastern Sri Lanka* (Transcript Verlag, 2014), 159.

208 Cf. N. Jayapalan, *Women Studies* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000), 13-20.

209 In the epic *Ramayanaya*, Ravana abducted Rama's wife Sita. In the end however, after killing Ravana, Rama returned with Sita. Then Rama faced the problem whether or not Sita had sexual contact with Ravana. Since Rama had to test whether his wife Sita was pure or impure, she was asked to walk through fire. She did and came out unscathed. This proved that even though she was away from her husband for a long time she was able to keep her purity and to be faithful to her own husband. Cf. Akhileshwar Jha, *Sexual Designs in Indian Culture*, 24.

and (3) Remaining a widow, practising widow penance (*tapatanilai*).[210] In spite of his preeminent leadership at the time of Indian independence, even Mahatma Gandhi, in the phase of Indian nationalism, projected "Sita of the Ramayanaya, the long suffering submissive woman as the model for Indian womanhood."[211] Women who have exemplified themselves as chaste and loyal to their partners are held as models to Tamil wives, especially through the rituals of marriage.[212]

Thiruchandran writes, "[T]he Sri Lankan Tamil construction of chastity does not prohibit remarriage but insists on fidelity which means being loyal both bodily and mentally to one husband/man within wedlock."[213] However, in marriage men do not speak of being faithful to 'one woman in my life'. It is important to note that the Tamil concept of a household (*Dharma-Aram*) is deeper than the ordinary idea of a household with a 'this-worldly' concept of household. As Thiruchandran claims, by the concept of *Aram*, transgressions of "… men are often accepted, forgiven and trivialised but within femininity, violations are constantly watched, ostracised, gossiped about and even punished."[214] Therefore, many women have the idea that it is more important for them to remain within this concept of *Aram* than to satisfy their personal needs.

Women are controlled by the patriarchal ideology that "women are the sexual property of men and that it is chaste womanhood that has to be valued and celebrated."[215] When men need women for their sexual pleasure, then women must be ready to be open to the needs and desires of their husbands at any time; at other times men think that women's sexual desires have to be controlled. In this patriarchal social construction women are seen as mere sex objects who do not have the right to take decisions about their sexual desires. In addition, women are not allowed to speak about the topic of 'sex' in their day-to-day lives because it is taboo for them to speak about sexual matters with others.[216]

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210 Cf. Selvy Thiruchandran, "The Social Implications of Tecawalamai and Their Relevance to the Status of Women in Jaffna," 76.

211 Ibid., 77.

212 Cf. Ibid., 77-78.

213 Selvy Thiruchandran, *The Other Victims of War,* 63.

214 Ibid., 64.

215 Ibid., 65.

216 Cf. Salla Sariola, *Gender and Sexuality in India: Selling Sex in Chennai* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 22.

Since in many religious and cultural traditions sex is considered sinful, widows who think of remarrying are placed within this negative social construction of sinfulness. Unlike the first marriage, the second marriage is considered to be a desire of the flesh. A woman initiating the process of remarriage is certainly taking an obvious risk and inviting the issue of her purity and chastity – it is considered disgraceful behaviour.[217] Therefore, in Sri Lankan Tamil culture people do not expect a woman to announce that she wants to marry again.

The second reason for not even thinking of remarriage, is the concept of motherhood. "Motherhood is seen within certain fixed qualities such as nurturing, sacrifice, kindness, love and tolerance as a package within an emotional and expressive framework. It is also spoken of as comprising supremely virtuous qualities, the violations of which are cast off as unwomanly and unfeminine."[218] Motherhood is seen as a "super-imposed role on women by the male power which has divorced itself from the care-giving role towards the children."[219]

4.2 Cultural Perception of Widows in Sinhala Communities

In the ancient Sinhala community, women whose husbands died, or who were divorced or who remained unmarried, were considered as widows. As Bulankulame states, the Sinhala term for widow, *vandabuwa*, is heavily stigmatised within the Sinhala community: "[T]his stigma is directly concerned with the woman's 'abandoned sexuality', unprotected now because of the absence of her husband, which in turn has become a concern within that particular cultural context."[220] In the ancient Sinhala community widows were seen in different ways: as destitute, grief-stricken or unfortunate individuals.

Compared to the situation of widows in India, the neighbouring country, widows in the Sinhala community were not controlled by social customs and norms of Buddhism. Lorna Dewaraja states, "[I]n Buddhism, by contrast, death is considered a natural and inevitable end for all beings. As

217 Cf. Katharina Thurnheer, *Life beyond Survival,* 158.

218 Selvy Thiruchandran, *The Other Victims of War*, 84.

219 Ibid., 84.

220 Indika Bulankulame, *Frozen Tears: Political Violence, Women, Children and Problems of Trauma in Southern Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Institute for the Advanced Study of Society and Culture, 2005), 49.

a result, a woman suffers no moral degradation on account of widowhood, nor is her social status altered in any way."[221] Indrani Munasinghe says, "[U]nlike in India, widows in ancient SL never suffered any social stigma or disgrace. It was true that it was a great calamity to lose one's partner in life."[222] Also added to this, Bulankulame declares "[H]owever, unlike in India there is no symbolic ritual widowhood like shaving the hair (tonsure) or the removal of the *sindur* plucked off her forehead or her wedding necklace being taken away. Nor is her diet restricted. However, she is perceived as unfortunate and inauspicious (*kalakanni*)."[223] Robert Knox, who spent nineteen years in the Kandyan kingdom from 1660 to 1679, states, "[T]hese women [widows] are of a very strong courageous spirit, taking nothing very much to heart, mourning more for fashion than affection, never overwhelmed neither with grief nor love. When their husbands are dead, all they care is where to get others, which they cannot long be without."[224] Shri Wimalakeerthi Thera says that according to Buddhist literature, even though a widow becomes a queen to the whole earth, the state of widowhood is a stigma for a woman.[225]

The perception of widows in Sinhala culture is also contentious because there are different attitudes towards widows. To understand the origin of these attitudes, it is necessary to look at how the ancient Sinhala communities regarded widows. The author of *Jataka Atuwa Gatapadaya*, a Sinhala Buddhist work of the eleventh or twelveth century notes:

> Widowhood is as denuded as a waterless or a kingless country even if she happened to have ten brothers, she has no status. Even if she were to be the paramount head chief of the entire earth, widowhood is still trauma to a woman. [226]

221 Lorna Dewaraja, "Buddhist Women in India and Pre-Colonial Sri Lanka," in *Buddhist Women across Cultures,* ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 71.

222 Indrani Munasinghe, *Sri Lankan Woman in Antiquity*, 164.

223 Ibid., 49.

224 Rober Knox, as quoted by Lorna Dewaraja, "Buddhist Women in India and Precolonial Sri Lanka," in *Buddhist Women across Cultures,* 71.

225 Cf. Shri Wimilakeerthi Uditha*, Bharathiya Dharma Shastra Saha Sinhala Sirith Wirith* [Indian Legal Codes and Sinhala Social Practices] (Colombo: Gunasena and Limited, 1982), 198.

226 English translation is quoted by Indrani Munasinghe, *Sri Lankan Woman in Antiquity*, 166.

This is found in one of the Sigiri graffiti written on the surface of the mirror wall of Sigiriya in SL between 600 CE and 1400 CE, that refers to the beautiful paintings of women: "*ni[ri]d–isira viyeva miya – risa pat (no van) ne ya*"[227] [why these ladies depicted in the art did not wish to die when their husbands, kings, had died]. The idea that a woman had to follow her husband in his death may be due to Brahmanic influence on the perception of widowhood. Furthermore, Munasinghe points out that in seeing the other graffiti some visitors assume these women to be the widows of kings, and question the ethic of widowhood as they adorned themselves with ornaments: *sav baranin saji giri – hisa sitihi kumata* (why are you standing on the top of the rock thoroughly adorning yourselves with ornaments). What is implied here, is that for a widow to adorn herself with ornaments was a taboo.[228] Analysing the Sigiri graffiti that convey a prominent aspect of social history through art in SL, one may argue that there was Indian influence on the perception of the Sinhalese's attitudes towards widows too.

In a Sinhala society, it is considered noble and one's duty to help widows. Kings in ancient kingdoms of this land, instead of treating widows unjustly, provided widows with food, clothing and land since they deserved to be looked after by the rulers of the country. According to the *Gal Vihara*/temple inscription in Polonnaruwa, one of the famous ancient kingdoms in SL, the monks who renounced their family members did have permission to go begging for food and medicine for their parents and widowed sisters.[229] Another significant example is that when the villagers in ancient Sinhala society cleaned the village water tanks, it was a custom to give a portion of fish to the widows and old people. This was also the custom among the *Veddas* who shared or gave the first portion of the animal they hunted to the widows in the community. Ancient society considered widows to be a group of people that they had to care for.[230] However, these examples do not provide evidence that the social recognition of widows made their situation equal to the position of other women in society, yet it is clear that there had been a concern for widows.

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227 Indrani Munasinghe, *Sri Lankan Woman in Antiquity*, 164.

228 Cf. Ibid., 165-166.

229 Cf. Ibid., 166. The monks used to go from house to house to collect food for them. It is a way of 'living' their humility and simplicity.

230 Alex Perera [an Anthopologist, University of Sabaragamuwa, Sri Lanka], interview by author, 10 July 2015, Kurunegala, Sri Lanka.

With these practices, perceptions and attitudes towards widowhood in mind, we will now examine two key areas connected to widowhood in Sinhala culture: inauspiciousness and remarriage.

4.2.1 Widowhood and Inauspiciousness in the Sinhala Community

The death of a husband, especially at a young age is considered as a woman's bad luck within the Sinhala community, especially among the Buddhists, due to which women are blamed for the death of their husbands.

It is a Sinhala community's belief that a married woman is a fortunate woman, but a woman after the death of her husband is a woman of misfortune. A widow is perceived as unfortunate and inauspicious irrespective of her religion, class and other social status.[231] If a woman for whatever reason remains single, without a man, her life is regarded as incomplete. Even though there are no derogatory rules or regulations that affect the dignity of widows, many practices and rituals are precisely derogatory to the respectability of widows in a Sinhala culture. Since widows are considered inauspicious, society does not expect them to partake in rituals of the auspicious events such as ceremonies around puberty, house warming and weddings. Sometimes people do not even meet them when they are about to leave for an auspicious or a special event.

In the Sinhala community death is considered as a moment of major religious and cultural significance both for the dead and the living, especially for women. A woman at the death of her husband is expected immediately to shun herself of all ornaments and for a period of three months as of the death of her husband and it is customarily expected of a woman to dress in white. During that period, it is not acceptable for a widow to participate in public ceremonies and festival events such as weddings, puberty rituals, New Year celebrations or any kind of entertainment. The Buddhist widow is prohibited to visit shrines of Gods as she would pollute them. This period of mourning is seen as a period of grieving and recovery, a time that enables a woman to adjust to a different life style as a widow.

4.2.2 Remarriage of Widows in the Sinhala Community

Indika Bulankulame notes, "in societies where patriarchy is deeply etched, the woman's independence, stability and individuality is controlled

231 Cf. Indika Bulankulame, *Frozen Tears*, 49.

by marriage."[232] The nature of a remarriage in the Sinhala community has to be discussed with this in mind. Similar to the Tamil community in SL, there is no legal prohibition on widows' remarriage and it is not looked down upon in the Sinhala community.

Lorna Dewaraja, in speaking of marriage in a historical context, clearly states that in Sri Lankan Buddhist society marriages receive no religious sanction and the law provides no restriction to the dissolution of marriages; remarriage of both partners is acceptable in SL.

> The Dutch, who were ruling the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka, wished to codify the laws and customs of the island. The Governor Iman Willem Falck sent a questionnaire to the eminent Buddhist monks in Kandy and recoded their answers in a document called the *Lakraja lo sirita*. According to this document, both husband and wife are allowed to initiate action for dissolving a marriage contract by proving the improper conduct of a spouse before a court of law. After divorce, both husband and wife were free to remarry and the wife was treated very liberally.[233]

Historical records provide evidence of women remarrying among royalty, nobility and common folk. In the *Mahāvaṃsa* many examples can be found of kings marrying widowed royal women, because widowhood was not an obstacle for women to living a respectable life in their society. Nevertheless, the situation of widows who did not come from royal families differed as they were expected to remain faithful to their husband, even after his death. As Munasinghe states, widows were supposed to look after the upbringing and welfare of their children and not to do anything to smear the husband's name.[234] A widow who remained loyal to her husband is considered a 'great woman' (*uththamaviya*). In Sinhala literature, Vihara Maha Devi, the mythical queen, is respected for upholding her morality and chastity. Such women are adored and are held up as icons in schools and remain highly venerated even within the religious context.

One of the main reasons for avoiding remarriage is loyalty to the dead husband. As Bulankulame claims, "memory places a great emphasis in keeping loyalty alive. Religious ceremonies also play a large public role in reminding people of the widow's commitment to her dead husband."[235]

232 Ibid., 61.

233 Lorna Dewaraja, "Buddhist Women in India and Pre-Colonial Sri Lanka," 71.

234 Cf. Indrani Munasinghe, *Sri Lankan Woman in Antiquity*, 166.

235 Indika Bulankulame, *Frozen Tears*, 67.

Therefore, for many women chastity and their subordinate position as widows with regard to sexuality leads them to not remarrying. Yet when widows are not economically strong enough to look after their children, their priority is to protect their children rather than to obey cultural ideologies. In one of the songs sung by Pradeepa Dharmadasa, a Sinhala artist, brings the reality of women in society into the public domain. She portrays the reality of a widow as follows:

Vine Katina un tarahak nokiyama	විනේ කටින උන් තරහක් නොකියාම
Kane kohomba mirikanawa hamadama	කනේ කොහොඹ මිරිකනවා හැමදාම
Gune rakaninnalu mala himigema	ගුණේ රකින්නලු මළ හිමිගේම
Wane natiwa un duka danne kohoma	වනේ නැතිව උන් දුක් දෙන්නේ කොහොම
Game gataw karabagena unnata	ගමේ ගැටව් කරබාගෙන උන්නාට
Wise nadda nakin pila uda raata	විසේ නැද්ද නාකින් පිල උඩ රැට
Nela ganimi yai kapruka piduwata	නෙලා ගනිමි යැයි කප්රුක පිදුවාට
Ine reddamai hitiye harahata	ඉනේ රෙද්දමයි හිටියේ හරහාට
Lame kirata moragahana patiyanta	ලැමේ කිරට මොර ගහනා පැටියන්ට
Ane kawda inne weelak denta	අනේ කවුද ඉන්නෙ වේලක් දෙන්ට
Lipe ginna thunwaruwe awulanta	ලිපේ ගින්න තුන් වරුවෙම අවුලන්ට
Warew mahatune kunukaya waladanta	වරෙව් මහතුනේ කුණු කය වළඳන්ට

The song highlights the plight of a widow. The first stanza describes how the villagers of the widow are saying unpleasant things to her while asking her to protect the good name of her husband. Yet the widow's reply is to ask how they know the pain of her heart as they have not undergone the pain of widowhood. The second stanza says that even though young men are quiet and sober, the elderly come after her. Although by being with them, she can make money, the social norms and cultural restrictions regarding women and widows hinder her from living in dignity. The next stanza tells of her little ones, crying in hunger, no one being sensitive enough to feed them. Going against cultural norms and restrictions that emphasise the nobility of chastity, she invites the men for pleasure so that she can provide a living for her children.

Even though marriage can bring bliss to both woman and man, very often the second marriages of widows are perceived as the widow entering into a new bond to satisfy her sexual needs. In many villages, there is a strong display of jealousy and negative attitudes towards widows when

marriage proposals are made. Hence, even though there are no legal codes that prohibit widows' remarriage, they are often discouraged from forming new partnerships as a consequence of the social and cultural perceptions: "expectations of chastity, loyalty to the dead husband ... prevent women from even thinking about re-marriage."[236]

The study of the conditions of widows from a historical and socio-cultural perspective indicates that to remain a widow in both the Tamil and Sinhala communities, which are patriarchal in nature, carries not only the psychological trauma of losing a husband, but effects the lives of widows negatively, due to socio-cultural restrictions placed on them.

Conclusion

In this chapter 'The contextualisation of war-widows in Sri Lanka', an overall view has been provided of the historical, socio-cultural, religious and political context of SL, which is necessary to understand the reality of war-widows in the country. The main focus of the thesis is, however, women who became widows due to the ethno-national war between the GoSL and the LTTE. The chapter made an attempt to analyse; (1) The social, religious, political and economic context of SL in which the situation of widows has to be studied; (2) The root causes of the ethno-national war, which lasted for three decades making many women widows; and (3) The cultural and religious factors that contributed to the continual marginalisation of war-widows. As the study indicated, the reality of war-widows, resulting from the ethno-national war of SL, is not an isolated phenomenon. It is an outcome of social, religious, cultural, economic and political factors that prevailed in the country for many centuries, a framework within which the marginalisation of the country's widows should be analysed.

As discussed in the second part of the first chapter, the patriarchal cultures of both Sinhalese and Tamils in SL have had a strong effect on the lives of women, especially of widows. Widowhood is a social stigma both among Sinhala and Tamil communities, that negatively affects the life of the widows, restricting them from social integration and dignified living. Becoming a widow is totally different from becoming a widower, due to gender differences. What had to be noted, however, is the fact that the marginalisation of widows is embedded in the oppressive social, cultural,

236 Ibid., 71.

religious, economic and political factors that are man-made and not fixed. The analysis of the cultural situation of widows further illustrates the unjust, irrational ideologies and perceptions regarding women, especially war-widows.

Furthermore, the ethno-national conflict between the GoSL and the LTTE which left many women widows, cannot be treated or studied separately if one wants to understand the reality of widows. Rather, a holistic approach, which looks into the social, economic, and political marginalisation of the Tamils in SL is imperative. Hence, it was necessary to investigate the realities of war-widows in SL in the post-war context to see whether there is a cohesion between the traditional perception of widows and the daily living experience of being war-widows – living as widows in family, society, religion and employment.

By paying attention to socio-political and religio-cultural contexts in SL, the following questions arise: How do the war-widows speak about their marginalisation and suffering? How do they deal with their suffering? What are their perceptions on religion and God? How are the widows involved with their families and the people at work and in society at large? Are there divergent experiences for both Tamil widows and Sinhala widows in the post-war situation? Is the oppression of the Tamil widow the same as the oppression of the Sinhala widow? Is there a connection between religion and the perception of widows in society? How does religion affect them in their everyday lives? How do religious teachings support them in facing life or are they a barrier to living in freedom? Answers to these questions will be sought in chapter two in which the findings will be presented of the fieldwork carried out among a group of Sinhala and Tamil war-widows who live face to face with tremendous suffering in post-war SL.

Chapter Two

THE FIELDWORK: WAR-WIDOWS' SUFFERING AND THEIR MARGINALISATION

Our personal stories of agony and joy, struggle and liberation are always connected with our socio-political and religio-cultural contexts.[1]

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, large numbers of Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim women were made war-widows as a result of the war between the GoSL and the LTTE, ending in 2009 without a proper political solution to the ethno-national conflict. It is against this background – the social context created by the war – that in the present chapter the findings of the fieldwork done in selected provinces of SL will be explored. This fieldwork was done with a selected group of Tamil Christian, Sinhala Christian and Sinhala Buddhist war-widows from different social, political, cultural, economic and educational backgrounds. The fieldwork will be presented under six subheadings: (1) The experience of war-widows with a theological reflection; (2) The choice of a research approach; (3) Preparation for the qualitative fieldwork; (4) The boundaries of the research; (5) The actual fieldwork; and (6) War-widows' resistance to the prevailing domineering structures.

Because critical experience is considered to be a source for theological reflection, the second chapter will elaborate on the findings of the actual fieldwork, focusing on my in-depth interviews with a selected group of war-widows. The findings of the interviews will reveal the experiences of both Buddhist and Christian war-widows in the Sri Lankan political, religious, cultural and economic context. How the women in the research sample happened to become war-widows, how they perceive and deal with their marginalisation amidst enormous social challenges, their involvement with family and society, are some of the themes that will be discussed in the present chapter. The aim of the chapter is to find answers to the questions: How do the women speak and deal with their own suffering? How do the widows perceive their religion, God/s and notions of suffering in their daily living? Do the widows consider their religion to

1 Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 1.

be a supportive element in resisting and overcoming their suffering or is the religion a barrier to overcoming their suffering?

1. Experience as a Source for Theological Thinking

> We do not 'do theology' for the sake of 'doing theology' but rather, because we who experience God moving within, between, and among us believe that we must try to articulate what it is that we experience, in order to point to and lift up the presence of God here and now and in order to live and speak in God, through God, and by God, rather than simply about God.[2]

For many feminist and liberation theologians, theology is primarily a critical reflection on historical praxis, which they consider to be the foundation for liberation and the restoration of the dignity of persons. Therefore, they do not separate thinking from acting. For them, theology and praxis are inextricably linked. This way of 'doing theology' reflects two basic elements: (1) it is something coming out of life in practice; and (2) it is something always in process.[3] It is not possible to do any authentic theology while neglecting the reflection of the prevailing social, cultural, religious, political and economic situation. Doing theology this way is an extra-ecclesial process, because they begin their theology from the viewpoint of historical praxis, different from abstract knowledge, and from the perspective of official Church teaching. Hence, this contextual theology can be considered to be a different approach in theological method.

Aloysius Pieris defines Asian liberation theology as the interpretation of 'The World' in the context of both an evangelical and an economic poverty (the former liberating and the latter enslaving) as well as within the context of both the redemptive core and the oppressive crust of Asian religiosity.[4] In A. Pieris's understanding, the Asian reality is the interplay of religiosity of the poor and the poverty of the religious masses.

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2 Carter Heyward, as quoted by Linda A. Moody, *Women Encounter God: Theology across the Boundaries of Difference* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 25.

3 Cf. Wong Wai Ching Angela, "Women Doing Theology with the Asian Ecumenical Movement," in *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology*, ed. Kwok Pui-Lan (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 40.

4 Cf. Aloysius Pieris, "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Churches?," in *Liberation in Asia: Theological Perspectives* eds. S. Arokiasamay and G. Gispert (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 1988), 17-20.

> … any systematic and logically coherent thinking, which is not firmly rooted in a praxis leading to liberation, is a species of *diṭṭhi* ('soteriological inconsequential speculation'), as the Buddha had pointed out, for this great Asian sage understood truth soteriologically rather than rationally, or much less, rationalistically.[5]

Many theologies have been sustained by a conception of men's power over women or of the power of the powerful over the powerless. The invisibility of the powerless, especially of women in theology has many negative impacts on women on social, cultural, political and economic levels. The invisibility of women in theology cannot be justified; theology from the perspective of women is an essential part of theology. This is especially true for the existing theologies found within the Sri Lankan context, where the voice of women must be taken into consideration.

2. The Approach of the Fieldwork

> Research approaches are plans and procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation.[6]

The aim of the present section is to look into three main field research approaches, namely; (1) Qualitative research, which was mainly practised in the social sciences from the late nineteenth century up and until the mid-twentieth century; (2) Quantitative research, which was introduced during the latter part of the twentieth century; (3) The development of mixed method research, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Qualitative research can be seen as an approach "for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem", whereas *quantitative research* is an approach "for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables." Additionally, the *mixed method* is an approach "to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data."[7]

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5 Aloysius Pieris, *The Genesis of an Asian Theology of Liberation: An Autobiographical Excursus on the Art of Theologizing in Asia* (Colombo: Karunarathne and Sons Pvt. Ltd, 2013), 23.

6 John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Method Approaches,* 4th edition (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2014), 3.

7 Ibid., 4.

There were three main significant considerations or three main questions that paved the way to selecting an appropriate research approach for carrying out the fieldwork on war-widows in SL: (1) What do I want to research? (2) Why do I want to research? (3) How do I want to research? After considering different arguments, ideas and views put forward by researchers engaged in different kinds of fields, Jody Miller and Barry Glassner conclude that "[A]ll we sociologists have are our stories. Some come from other people, some from us, some from our interactions with others. What matters is to understand how and where the stories are produced, which sort of stories they are, and how we can put them to honest and intelligent use in theorising about social life."[8]

Upon thorough reflection on these three alternative approaches, the most relevant for the present research study appeared to be the qualitative approach for focusing on the war-widows' new ways of dealing with their experience in social, cultural and religious situations. As David Silverman says, "[B]oth qualitative and quantitative researchers are concerned with the individual's point of view. However, qualitative investigators think that they can get closer to the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing and observation."[9] The same approach, used by many qualitative investigators, shaped the decision to carry out the present fieldwork based on the qualitative approach, a type of scientific research.

2.1 A Qualitative Research Approach: An Introduction

Within recent decades, researchers have given a more prominent place to qualitative research. Johnny Saldaña defines qualitative research in his book *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research*, as follows: "qualitative research is an umbrella term for a wide variety of approaches to and methods for the study of natural social life."[10] Sharan Merriam cites Van Maanen's more concise, though more dated definition of the qualitative method as "an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques

8 Jody Miller and Barry Glassner, "The 'Inside' and the 'Outside': Finding Realities in Interview," in *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice,* ed. David Silverman 2nd edition (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), 138.

9 Ibid., 138.

10 Johnny Saldaña, *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world."[11] The two aforementioned scholars along with many other qualitative researchers are interested in "understanding the meaning people have constructed."[12]

Firstly, qualitative researchers focus on meaning and understanding, which means they try to understand the way people make sense of their lives (from the perspective of the participants). Secondly, a qualitative researcher is seen as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. It is important to mention that the human instrument has biases due to his/her personal, social and religious background. Yet the significance of the researcher lies in the way he/she deals with these biases in order to see how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data. Thirdly, the process of qualitative study is inductive: the researcher works towards building a theory from his/her observations and understandings from being in the field rather than testing hypotheses. This does not mean that the researcher enters the field without any theoretical framework, but the point is to highlight that the framework is informed by what he/she gained from the field. Fourthly, the product of the qualitative research could be considered as richly descriptive: the experiences of the fieldwork are conveyed through words rather than numbers.[13]

Since the present thesis is partly based on the findings of the fieldwork concerning Sri Lankan war-widows, the selection of an appropriate method was one of the key elements in the first stage of the research. Therefore, the next section will deal with the research method, which was selected for collecting valuable and necessary data with a view to the main research question: How do the war-widows deal with their suffering, crossing the barriers and moving beyond the teachings of suffering in Buddhist philosophical and Christian theological thinking? The theological questions neither fall from the sky nor are derived from the academy; rather, they come from the experience of women in a specific social context. In speaking about the suffering and resistance of the war-

11 Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco, GA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 13.

12 Ibid., 13.

13 Cf. Ibid., 13-16.

widows, it is necessary to explore what makes them resist; from where they get strength to resist their marginalisation in society; and what kind of repercussions they have to face when they resist the prevailing societal structures. Hence, based on the central question of the research, the aim of this chapter is to deal with the religious, cultural, economic and political aspects of the lives of the war-widows in SL in continuation with the work that was already partly done in the first chapter.

2.2 Selection of the Qualitative Data Collection Method

> The relevance and significance of research findings and the use to which findings may be put are dependent on the appropriate choice of method, which must be designed to meet the aims and objectives of the project.[14]

Obviously, the aim or the purpose of the research plays a major role in the choice of a proper method. In addition to this key factor in selecting a suitable method, there are some other important criteria such as 'appropriateness' [Is this method appropriate for all of the cultures being studied?], 'depth' [will this method allow me to gain sufficient depth to understand the phenomenon?], and 'ethical acceptability' [Is this method ethically acceptable in all cultures in which the study is undertaken?].[15] Being aware of different types of qualitative methods available, this section sketches four types of naturalistic data-gathering methods in qualitative approach.

1) Observation. This is "an ideal means for noting behaviours that people may be unaware of, such as the non-verbal behaviours of gestures, postures, or even seating arrangements."[16] Doing participatory observation prior to interviewing, sensitises the researcher to key issues and helps to familiarise him/her with the environment before starting to ask people questions. Or as Earl Babbie argues, "[F]ield researchers need not always participate

14 Zoebia Ali et al.,... "Setting the Agenda," in *Extending Social Research: Application, Implementation and Publication*, eds. Gayle Letherby and Paul Bywaters (McGraw-Hill: Open University Press, 2007), 73.

15 Cf. Michele J. Gelfand, Jane L. Raver, and Karen Holcombe Ehrhart, "Methodical Issues in Cross-Cultural Organizational Research," in *Handbook of Research Methods in Industrial Organizational Psychology*, ed. Steven G. Rogelberg (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007), 225-227.

16 Leonard Cargan, *Doing Social Research* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 142.

in what they're studying, though they usually will study it directly at the scene of the action."[17]

2) The qualitative interview. "A qualitative interview is an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry, including the topics to be covered, but not a set of questions that must be asked orally and in a particular order."[18] This method is based on structured, semi-structured or unstructured interviews. It is also important to be familiar with the questions to be asked in order to carry out the interview smoothly and naturally. In the qualitative interview the respondent provides information while the interviewer, as a representative of the study, is responsible for directing the conversation to the topics relevant to the study. As Jody Miller and Barry Glassner assert that qualitative interviews are very widely used by those who try to understand the way people make sense of their lives.[19]

3) The focus group. This method is also called group interviewing, that is, "a group of subjects interviewed together, prompting a discussion."[20] It is based on structured, semi- structured or unstructured interviews, and what takes place in this method is that the researcher or the interviewer questions several individuals systematically and simultaneously. The purpose of using this method is "to explore rather than to describe or explain in any definitive sense."[21]

4) Document analysis. This involves examining documents such as newspapers, speeches, personal and public letters, internet-posts and previous interviews.[22] The document analysis helps the researcher to gain an understanding of the environment of the field.

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17 Earl Babbie, *The Basics of Social Research,* 4th edition (Wadsworth: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008), 318.

18 Ibid., 340.

19 Cf. Jody Miller and Barry Glassner, "The 'Inside' and the 'Outside': Finding Realities in Interview," 127.

20 Earl Babbie, *The Basics of Social Research*, 343.

21 Ibid., 343.

22 Cf. Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data,* 3rd edition (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2012), 26-27.

Most qualitative research studies are carried out by 'qualitative interviews' with participants, as interviewing is the primary tool of qualitative research. On the one hand, the strength of the qualitative interviewing paves the way for the respondent to **reveal** his/her experience, feelings, memories, beliefs, problems and hope. On the other hand, this kind of research helps the interviewer to **discover** the experiences – 'to get inside the black box' – to develop a level of trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. Jody Miller and Barry Glassner contend that the strength of qualitative interviewing is the opportunity that it provides to collect and rigorously examine narrative accounts of social worlds.

2.3 Selection of Qualitative Interview Study

In speaking about the reasons for undertaking a qualitative interview study, Robert Weiss presents (as it were) why the qualitative interview study is a good method for the present work:

(1) Developing detailed descriptions: we want to learn as much as we can about an event or development that we weren't there to see.

(2) Integrating multiple perspectives: we may want to describe an organisation, development, or event that no single person could have observed in its totality.

(3) Describing process: we may want to know, about some human enterprise, how events occur or what an event produces.

(4) Developing a holistic description: by putting together process reports from people whose behaviours interrelate, we can learn about a system.

(5) Learning how events are interpreted: we might want to learn not so much about an event as about how it is interpreted by participants and onlookers.

(6) Bridging inter subjectivities: we might want to produce a report that makes it possible for readers to grasp a situation from the inside, as a participant might.

(7) Identifying variables and framing hypotheses for quantitative research.[23]

Interviews help researchers to explore in detail the experiences – sometimes events the researchers have never experienced – motives and opinions of others and to learn to see the world from the perspectives of the participants. It allows the researcher to portray ongoing social processes and to explore complex, contradictory, or counter-intuitive matters by exploring multiple perspectives on an issue. It is the tool of choice for exploring personal and sensitive issues or morally ambiguous choices people have

23 Cf. Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 9-10.

made.[24] Jody Miller and Barry Glassner argue that, "information about the social world is achievable through in-depth interviewing."[25]

In light of the above, the present research uses a qualitative approach to study Sri Lankan war-widows' resistance to marginalisation, based on the qualitative interview method.

3. Preparation for the Qualitative Fieldwork

The preparation for the fieldwork became an important aspect at the beginning of the study. As Elia Milgro states, "… research is a process through which researchers attempt to achieve systematically, and with the support of data, the answer to a question, the resolution of a problem, or a particular phenomenon."[26] Therefore, research is not mere fact finding from the field, a library, or anywhere else about a certain topic. A qualitative research entails real life conditions. In the present study, it is the real life conditions of the war-widows' challenging ways of dealing with their marginalisation in SL.

3.1 Preliminary Discussion as a Preparation for the Fieldwork

As is mentioned in *Qualitative Marketing Research,* "securing co-operation from respondents, dealing with refusals of participants and what to do when co-operation is not forthcoming, considering the ethics involved, and planning the implementation of the fieldwork are some important elements that a researcher should be aware of."[27] In the present research, preliminary discussion appeared to be a preparation. It occurred on two levels. Firstly, the preliminary discussions at an academic level and secondly, the discussion with three selected war-widows – one Tamil Christian, one Sinhala Christian and one Sinhala Buddhist – as well as with a few women who were engaged in working with the war-widows in SL helped organise practical aspects of the fieldwork.

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24 Cf. Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 3-4.

25 Jody Miller and Barry Glassner, "The 'Inside' and the 'Outside': Finding Realities in Interview," 138.

26 Elia Shabani Mligo, *Doing Effective Fieldwork: A Text Book for Students of Qualitative Field Research in Higher-Learning Institutions* (Eugene: Resource Publishers, 2013), section 5.

27 David Carson et al.,... *Qualitative Marketing Research* (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001), 173.

3.2 Reviewing Previous Studies Relevant to the Present Research

Cliff Bunnings notes, "[T]here is an initial task to acquire and review literature relevant to your expected main content themes, as well as your intended process methodologies before becoming active in the field."[28]

A review of literature before starting the fieldwork is needed in order to understand the subject of the fieldwork, to be informed by the in-depth knowledge of others with relevant research experience. After providing a definition of research, Elia Shabani Mligo argues "… every researcher needs to make his/her research open to further investigation of the same issue. This means that the same phenomenon can have different research results for different purposes."[29] This section will therefore review previous research studies connected to the present topic by some Sri Lankan researchers and one foreign researcher.

1) Selvy Thiruchandran, a feminist scholar in Social Studies and Cultural Anthropology, carried out research in two districts in Eastern SL – Trincomalee and Amparai – and she highlighted the social, cultural, religious, economic and political experiences of female-headed families, through qualitative methodology.[30] As she states, these women have become heads of families, due to their being widowed as a result of the armed conflict or for other reasons such as separation, divorce or death. Thiruchandran points out that these women are not mere victims, but courageously showing their resistance by breaking the silence: pointing their finger at structures that repress them and at people who are violent.[31]

Thiruchandran examines the social and psychological dimension of the problem and the role of religion in the lives of these female heads of households. She gives short descriptions of three categories of women who expressed their opinions regarding the impact of religion: (1) Intensely religious women whose husbands disappeared; (2) Moderately religious women, temple-goers, whose husbands died due to natural causes or whose husbands deserted them for new wives; (3) Women whose husbands were killed and who were in the

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28 Cliff Bunning, "Achieving Success in Postgraduate Action Research Programmes," in *Action Learning at Work,* ed. Alan Mumford (Aldershot: Gower Publishing Limited, 1997), 321.

29 Elia Shabani Mligo, *Doing Effective Fieldwork*, section 5.

30 Cf. Selvy Thiruchandran, *The Other Victims of War,* 19-115.

31 Cf. Ibid., 123.

process of becoming atheists (resentment).[32] She also remarks that there is a trend of breaking voluntarily with the traditional religions. She mentions that some have become Christians – Anglicans and Catholics – and are at peace in their new religion: "conversion or the induction to the new faith has brought them new avenues, to be released from their affliction."[33] The whole process of this conversion highlights, according to Thiruchandran, the need for a psychological approach to the problem of depression. One of her conclusions is that "professional counselling is the need of the hour, irrespective of whether religion or religions have met their needs."[34]

2) Kanchana Ruwanpura, a scholar in Development Studies, using data and case-study evidence gathered from the fieldwork done on female-headed households in the Sinhala community of Eastern SL (1998-1999), highlights the different faces of the ethno-national war. Since different ethnic groups bear the impact of conflict in different ways, she speaks about the indirect costs of the conflict to the female heads of households in the Sinhala community.

According to Ruwanpura, even though Buddhism offers women some freedom, they still have a subordinate role in SL. She states that, even at the juncture of ethnic conflict, the Buddhist patriarchal ideologies have an impact on ideals of 'moral motherhood' and women warriors. Ruwanpura says that during the war applies that for a mother to attain *nirvāṇa* it is more than enough to sacrifice her son to protect the country from the LTTE.[35]

Speaking about the social customs and kinship patterns, Ruwanpura goes on to say how social customs and kinship patterns traditionally appear to have positioned women favourably, yet women's social space has been restricted due to historical and legislative reforms as well as the ethno-nationalist discourse. However, compared to the restrictions that Muslim and Hindu women face, Sinhala women do not have to deal with such severe cultural restrictions, even though they still do not enjoy real autonomy and emancipation because they remain trapped in community structures that perpetuate patriarchal expectations of 'proper' behaviour for women.[36] By saying this, Ruwanpura shows the importance of articulating development

32 Cf. Ibid., 47.
33 Ibid., 52.
34 Ibid., 53.
35 Cf. Ibid., 3-4.
36 Cf. Ibid., 31.

policies for female leadership in the Sinhala community that is undergoing changes in household structures and moving beyond the patriarchal household models.

3) Kanchana Ruwanpura, using data and case study evidence from other fieldwork in Eastern SL during 1998-1999, also explores different ways in which Muslim women in this region were forced to become female heads of households. She explains how most of these women became war-widows mainly as a result of the armed conflict in SL, but also due to other events such as divorce, separation and desertion. She states the importance of uncovering the different dynamics of conflict and non-conflict factors and the way they lead to the transformation of household structures.[37] Ruwanpura also affirms the effectiveness of these Muslim female heads of households who challenge the social, economic, cultural and religious restrictions they face "to move beyond the patriarchal households in basing development policies, projects, and practices."[38]

4) Raksha Vasudevan, a research fellow in Sustainable Community Development, addresses two key questions on the basis of fieldwork conducted in ten small towns in the Northern region of SL, where approximately 40,000 women have become the heads of their families, mainly due to the war: (1) What specific vulnerabilities and insecurities are produced or exacerbated among female heads as a result of state-led actions? (2) Which strategies did these women resort to in response? She identifies multi-faceted economic, physical and psycho-social vulnerabilities the female heads of household's face in the post-war context. Crucially, she describes the alternative strategies and responses of the female-headed households that are used to avert these vulnerabilities and challenge the structures of patriarchy and state-led domination. Her intention is to emphasise that in spite of all the hardships and oppressive structures, these female heads of households are more confident in becoming active agents rather than in remaining victims of socio-political manipulation.[39]

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37 Cf. Kanachana N. Ruwanpura, "Female Headship among Muslims in Eastern Sri Lanka: A Case of Changing Household Structures," *Nivedini: Journal of Gender Studies* 11, no. x (July/August, 2004): 17.

38 Ibid., 17.

39 Cf. Raksha Vasudevan, *Everyday Resistance: Female Headed Households in Northern Sri Lanka* (Geneva: The Graduate Institute Publications, 2013).

5) Sepali Kottegoda, Executive Director of the Women and Media Collective in SL and a member of the Steering Committee Asia Pacific Women's Watch, investigated the emergence of female-headed households in SL moving into the twenty first century. She highlights the women's needs and concerns in the context of armed conflict by way of looking at various key areas that have been identified by organisations and individuals who have been working at ground level in places of armed conflict: "(1) the emotional and personal needs of these women and their households, and (2) the recognition of their needs and concerns at public level."[40] While acknowledging the emergence of female-headed families out of the armed conflict, Kottegoda stresses how important it is that the state and NGO's formulate programmes to support those female-headed households and handle the challenges these women face on a daily basis.[41]

Sara Delamont states that it is indispensible to seek out the "marvellous tales of others as they provide the basic knowledge and some guidelines to begin the study."[42] However, it is also important to bear in mind that no two fieldwork-situations are the same, meaning that the researchers, as well as the people being studied, change with time, experience and different political, social, cultural and religious changes.

The findings of these previous research studies and the focus on the war-widows' resistance to and coping with their marginalisation in SL, will be important elements in the next chapter of this study where the existing theologies in SL will be challenged.

3.3 Formulating an In-Depth-Interview Guide

The experience of war-widows was explored through in-depth interviews, a face-to-face dialogue between the widows and the researcher, based on open-ended questions.[43] In-depth interviewing is described as "a meaning-making partnership between interviewers and their respondents", which indicates that in-depth interviews are "a special kind of knowledge-

40 Sepalika Kottegoda, "Female Headed Households in Situation of Armed Conflict: A Note on Some Issues of Concern," *Nivedini: Journal of Gender Studies* 14, no. 2 (December 1996): 12-17.

41 Cf. Ibid., 17.

42 Sara Delamont, *Fieldwork in Educational Settings: Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives,* 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 2002), 30.

43 See appendix 1 (page 453).

producing conversation."[44] It is also important to mention the following characteristics of in-depth interviews that are included in the present study: (1) Using a semi-structured interview guide to prompt the data collection; (2) Establishing a *rapport* (a trust relationship) between the interviewer and interviewee; (3) Asking questions in an open, emphatic way; and (4) Motivating the interviewees to tell their stories by *probing*.[45]

The general themes included in the in-depth-interview guide for the present study were: (1) The experience of becoming a war-widow; (2) The experience of remaining a widow; (3) The changes and challenges that war-widows have to face; (4) New ways of dealing with widowhood in the prevailing social, cultural and religious situation; (5) War-widows' personal views about God/s and religion and their influence on life. Since the interview guide is a framework and not a rigid agenda, it helped to begin the conversation with the key element of flexibility.

Each selected war-widow was informed about the purpose of the research and what was expected of her, she was made aware of the fact that she was a volunteer and could withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions and she was told that she could rest assured that confidentiality would be protected. The primary objective when working with human participants in research is, 'But first, do not harm.' Hence, priority was given to affirming the security and dignity of the respondents during the interviews. All the arrangements, except in a few cases, were organised at the convenience of the respondents. Recordings of the interviews were made with the consent of the respondents and they are not available due to security reasons.

3.4 Pre-Testing the Interview Guide: A Pilot Study

A pilot study is a collection of preliminary information about the fieldwork, which determines "the effectiveness of the interview guide in terms of both the content and process of the focus group."[46] The pilot group consisted of a Sinhala Buddhist, a Sinhala Christian and two Tamil Christians. They helped to get an idea of how the interview guide worked in practice. Furthermore, pre-testing the questionnaire with a pilot group helped to plan all the necessary arrangements regarding the interviews.

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44 Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter, Ajay Bailey, *Qualitative Research Methods* (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2011), 109.

45 Cf. Ibid., 109.

46 Ibid., 118.

3.5 The Selection of the Respondents: The Research Sample

With a view to the focus on war-widows' new ways of dealing with their suffering in the present context, the research sample consisted of eighteen war-widows selected on the basis of their ethnicity, religion and social class. The selection consisted of seven Tamil and eleven Sinhala war-widows. All of the Tamil war-widows were Christians and out of the eleven Sinhala war-widows seven were Buddhists and four Christians. The research sample was selected from seven provinces of the country: North, East, South, West, North-Central, Central and Sabaragamuwa (figure 1). As to the selection of Tamil war-widows, priority was given to the war-widows in the 'Vanni' area where the last phase of the war took place and a great number of Tamil women became war-widows (figures 1and 2).

Figure 1: Location of the Provinces

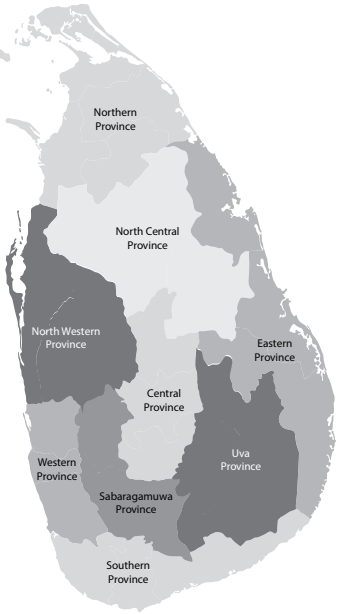

Figure 2: Vanni Area in the Nortth

A large number of Tamils along with Sinhalese and Muslims were made war-widows following the war between the GoSL and the LTTE that ended in 2009. Hence, the fieldwork was carried out in only two ethnic communities – Sinhala and Tamil – and two religious communities – Buddhist and Christian. At present, Buddhists in SL are Sinhalese and Hindus are Tamils. Christianity is the religion of some Tamils and some

Sinhalese. Even though it would be important to carry out this study among all the ethnic and religious communities in the country, the limited focus of this study on the Sinhala Buddhists, Sinhala Christians and Tamil Christians was imperative in order to keep the study within a manageable academic framework. The main reason for selecting Tamil Christians, who are the minority of Tamils, instead of Hindus, who are the majority, was the objective to highlight the situation of both Tamil and Sinhala Christians.

The war-widows interviewed were between twenty-eight to fifty-nine years of age. The research sample consisted of grassroots activists, women who were involved in different occupations. Some of them have re-married and some remained single. The following is a summary of the respondents:

Table: 1 Summary of the Respondents

No	Anonymous Name	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Region	Occupation	Education
Tamil-Christian war-widows							
1	Malar	28	Tamil	Christian	North	Road mending/ working in a factory	O/L*
2	Therese	30	Tamil	Christian	North	Working in a bag factory	A/L*
3	Rita	35	Tamil	Christian	North	Working in a crab factory	O/L
4	Rani	37	Tamil	Christian	North	Working in a factory	Graduate
5	Kamalani	39	Tamil	Christian	North	Food item business-group of war-widows	A/L
6	Selvy	52	Tamil	Christian	North	Teacher	Graduate
7	Mary	59	Tamil	Christian	North	Food selling	Grade 8*

No	Anonymous Name	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Region	Occupation	Education
Sinhala-Christian war-widows							
08	Magdalene	28	Sinhala	Christian	West	Working in a small garment factory	O/L
09	Judith	35	Sinhala	Christian	South	Cultivation	A/L
10	Anne	48	Sinhala	Christian	West	Planning to open a salon	Graduate
11	Bernadette	43	Sinhala	Christian	West	Supervisor of a garment factory	A/L
Sinhala-Buddhist war-widows							
12	Vishaka	34	Sinhala	Buddhist	Central	Housewife	A/L
13	Pushpa	35	Sinhala	Buddhist	South	Housewife	O/L
14	Devika	38	Sinhala	Buddhist	South	Teacher	Graduate
15	Anoma	40	Sinhala	Buddhist	Sabarag-amuwa	Housewife	Graduate
16	Samudra	42	Sinhala	Buddhist	Central	Garment busines	O/L
17	Prabodha	45	Sinhala	Buddhist	East	Politician-Divisional	Graduate
18	Yashoda	55	Sinhala	Buddhist	North Central	Housewife	O/L

* A/L – Advanced Level Exam (17-18 years old)
* O/L – Ordinary Level Exam (16 years old)
* Grade 8 (13 years old)

4. The Boundaries of the Research

The experience of interviewing war-widows and the observation of their lifestyles provided valuable input for the study of the war-widows' suffering and their resistance to the prevailing social, cultural and religious marginalisation. There were various kinds of restrictions that led me to

search for alternative ways of analysing the real situation of the country, in particular in the North of SL. The reactions and contributions of both the Tamil and Sinhala war-widows were highly appreciated because they were not inhibited about my personal, religious or ethnic background. I encountered no problems in interviewing either Christian or Buddhist Sinhala women, neither in the South nor in the Eastern part of the country. However, there were difficulties in interviewing the Tamil war-widows in the Vanni area, but these were not due to any reservation on the part of the widows but to the constant surveillance and interruption by military forces and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

For security reasons in some places in the North, a number of war-widows could not be reached. I was, for example, interrogated by Sinhala soldiers on the purpose of my visit. Since I had not informed the high authorities of my visit, I was not allowed to conduct the interviews. For the same reason, I was unable to interview war-widows in their houses in some other places. My reason for not informing the heads of the military forces was based on my personal experience of not being granted permission to interview women on a prior occasion. This experience led to devising alternative ways of interviewing some of the war-widows.

In the beginning, due to a lack of understanding of the real situation in the Northern part of SL, I argued with army officers about my right to visit anyone in the country. Later on however, I decided not to do the same because I suspected that once I returned from the North to Colombo, this might cause trouble for the war-widows I had interviewed. Since the security of the war-widows was and is my highest priority, I decided to use alternative ways for interviewing them.

It is important to relate that in two villages in the North I was questioned by two Catholic priests regarding my visit to war-widows in their respective parishes. One of them queried, "[H]ow do you visit the houses of the war-widows without my permission?" I justified my visits by explaining to him what the freedom and the rights are about that are upheld by both the civil law of the country and the canon law of the Church. It was a misconception that the priests were hostile to me because of their patriarchal mind-set. I realised however that their objections had to do with something that was not personal, but political: it concerned the fact that I

am a Sinhalese. It is the Tamil's suspicion of a Sinhalese that the Sinhala people have to learn to accept in the process of building true reconciliation because of the mistakes 'we' the Sinhalese as a nation have made to the Tamil nation since the post-independence in SL.

The majority of the Tamil war-widows in the country are Hindus. There are some Hindu war-widows who are dealing with their widowhood in a new way: a kind of resistance to the prevailing structures in the political, cultural and religious spheres. For example, a few women who were actively involved in politics were Hindus. Another aspect is that Hindus live with more cultural and religious restrictions than the Christians. Breaking rituals is therefore more difficult for Hindus than for Christians. Yet there were some Hindu war-widows who did break some religious and cultural taboos that were imposed on them. As mentioned before, this thesis focuses on Christian and Buddhist war-widows, and intends to explore the experiences of Buddhists and Christians.

Many families in the North and East were curious to know why I was visiting only some selected women, as they did not know the purpose of my visit. Some of them had the idea that I was there to get some information for distributing something or to start a new project.

Listening to the stories of all the war-widows, especially the ones told by the Tamils, was very moving, because what I gathered was not just a collection of information but a living testimony to a huge tragedy: a genocide that continues even today, albeit by other means. My translators and I therefore had to prepare ourselves for listening to the tragic stories of the war-widows. I was, moreover, dependent on translators because I do not speak Tamil. During my fieldwork, even though I realised that war-widows did not want to be called 'war-widow', I had to use the term for the purpose of the present study.

5. The Actual Fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted from April to July 2014, five years after the end of the war. It was my first visit to some of the Northern parts of the country, even though I am a Sri Lankan who was born and brought up during the conflict. The fieldwork gave me a first-hand experience of the reality of the war-widows in the North and East.

5.1 The Backdrop to the Fieldwork

The Northern part of the country looked totally different than the other parts of SL, due to the heavy presence of the military. In those areas where the worst of the war was experienced, one could still see the scars of the brutal war. The situation in the North still is desperate. When entering some villages in the Vanni area, the disintegration of a community was a hard thing to fathom. Apart from the loss of thousands of lives, what one sees now in the villages is the wasteland of rubble. Artillery bombing turned houses into ruins, which is heavily indicative of the cruelty of the war that, on top of everything, ended without any political solution for the Tamils in SL. The visit to 'Mullivaikkal', where thousands of Tamils were massacred during the last few months of the war, was a compelling and painful experience for a student and writer carrying out fieldwork. Many houses in the areas have been either damaged or razed to the ground since the conflict began: it evoked to me a desert of painful memories where people struggled to save their lives.

Since the majority of the people in the country are Buddhists it is quite common to have Buddhist temples and Buddhist statues in places where most of the Buddhists live. What disturbed me on my field visit to the Northern part, a region where the majority of the Hindus live along with some Christians and Muslims, was to see that Buddhist statues and Buddhist temples had even been built where little or no Buddhists live. The point at issue is the question of the purpose of such a large number of Buddhist temples and Buddhist statues in mainly Hindu areas. Who is responsible for this blatant disregard for Tamil culture? What is the hidden agenda in building Buddhist temples? This region, home to Tamils and some Muslims, had been occupied by the Sinhalese from the South. The latter owned most of the shops in the towns and some of the shops were run by the armed forces. One might argue that this new emergence of Sinhalese in the Tamil areas is an effort for the purpose of ethnic coexistence, yet, as discussed in chapter one, it is important to realise that the real reason for the 'Sinhalisation' of the Tamil areas involves a broader perspective, and to bear in mind what has been happening in the decades since the independence.

During my stay in the North, I saw many Sinhalese coming to the North on a scenic and leisure trip: travel is now made easier, as the main

roads all over the area have been re-built by the GoSL with the support of the foreign aid to promote tourism and business. The tragedy was to see the insensitivity displayed by many Sinhalese and some Tamils living in the Colombo area towards the suffering and the 'poverty' – economic, political, and social – of the Tamils who are living in the Vanni area. I happened to witness incidents where the Tamils were not allowed to enter some places in their homeland, while the Sinhalese were allowed without any hesitation.

5.2 Interviewing the War-Widows

Freedom of movement is a human right, which is embedded in our constitution that encompasses the right of individuals to travel freely from place to place within the country. Knowing full well that the law permits visiting each and every place in the country, soldiers stated that it was not necessary to get their permission but to keep them informed, when I was visiting the war-widows. This has to be interpreted as a formality or mechanism that soldiers have to maintain control over the people in the country. Interviewing the Sinhala war-widows went without any trouble, while interviewing the Tamils in the North was a complex task due to various external and internal factors. The experiences disturbed me because if I was treated that way as a Sinhalese, what then would be the experience of Tamils who are always under vigilance of the military forces?

5.2.1 The Reason/s that Made War-Widows

Of the seven Tamil war-widows interviewed, five were widowed with the death of their husbands in war [Interview numbers 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6]. One of the widows in this group, upon receiving the death notice of her husband from the LTTE, did not accept the death of her husband because she did not see the body of her husband [Interview number 2]. Of the remaining two, one widow's husband had died immediately after the war as he suffered from depression [Interview number 7) and the other widow's husband had committed suicide due to depression after the war [Interview number 4]. All of the men, except one who was a member of the LTTE, were unarmed at the moment they died.

Of the eleven Sinhala war-widows,[47] nine had become war-widows due to the death of husbands who were in the armed forces of the GoSL during the war [Interview numbers 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 18]. One Sinhala widow's husband had been killed in a public attack by the LTTE [Interview number 11], while the other woman had become a widow when her husband was killed by the LTTE while fishing [Interview number 17].

According to the findings of the interviews, all the Tamil war-widows except two, had lost husbands who were civilians during the war, whereas, except for two cases, all the Sinhala war-widows had lost husbands who were soldiers engaged in the war.

There is a difference between civilian deaths, while living in families, and being killed in action while fighting on behalf of the government or the LTTE. The ordinary civilians became victims of the war without being engaged in any military activity.

5.2.2 The First Reaction/s of War-Widows to the Death of Their Husbands

The first reactions or feelings that war-widows had when they saw or heard of the death of their husbands varied. Two of the Tamil widows' responses to the question about her first reaction to the death of her husband were:

> If you are a Tamil, you never ask this question, because we know that we were shocked and we could not believe what happened to us. We did not know what to do. Where to go …. It was very strange. We just ran from one place to the other. When we went to another place only we realised that some people who were with us at the previous moment had died. Yes, [her voice was very painful] when I was in the refugee camp only, I began to think of my past experiences. Oh my Jesus, it was very difficult. After fighting many decades, we could not reach what we wanted. I cannot understand what will be the next step ... anyway, war is enough .... No more war. We are fed up now. Anyway, it does not mean that we do not want to fight for our rights [Interview number 7: Tamil Christian].

> My husband was in the movement [LTTE]. I am proud of him as he fought for the rights of our people until the last moment. Anyway, as the wife of him, when I came to know about his death my whole life was collapsed. We lived together only for one year [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

47 The study is based on experiences of Buddhist and Christian war-widows. Therefore, the balance of the research sample has to consist of eleven Sinhala widows including seven Buddhist and four Christian Sinhala widows.

Most of the women experienced common feelings such as loneliness, despair, sadness, anger, emptiness and discouragement, yet despite those feelings, some of them were courageous and had hope so that they could face life after the death of their husbands. Looking closely at the first reactions and feelings of the war-widows interviewed, I could discern three key elements; (1) A dreadful loneliness due to the death of their husbands; (2) Vivid memories relating to their husbands' lives; and (3) The challenge of bringing up children with all the difficulties resulting from the absence of their husbands especially due to cultural, religious and political marginalisation. For example:

> Last time when my husband came home, he told me that the situation was not good in the battlefield. He gave me his wedding ring and asked me to look after the child if something happens to him. The following week, I got the message of the death of my husband. It was too difficult. Whatever you get from the government no one can fill the gap of my husband. He was my life; there is no life without him. His last words still echo in me [Interview number 15: Sinhala Buddhist].

> Can you imagine my husband died when he was with me in the bunker? He is an innocent man. Why did the government destroy our people? I still feel the struggle of my husband. He did not want to leave me alone. Yes, I know for sure, he did not want to leave me alone in this world. He loved me so much [Interview number 5: Tamil Christian].

Obviously, the death of her husband caused her pain. It was difficult for her and other Tamil war-widows to accept the death of their husbands, husbands who were not engaged in the war but who died as a result of the war. This was the same for the two Sinhala war-widows who lost their husbands, men who were not in the armed forces. Since the war took place in the North and the East, thousands of unarmed Tamil civilians died over the last three decades, with many women becoming war-widows at a young age. The Tamil war-widows said that the way their husbands died (mainly due to bombing) was a tragedy for them, one that they would never be able to overcome. Many of them felt guilty that they had been unable to at least give their husbands a decent/respectable burial:

> My whole life collapsed. No one in this world will understand the pain of my heart. Without having any ritual, we simply buried his [husband's]

> body. It still disturbs me. I couldn't say Goodbye to him in a proper way, because on the same day, we had to move to another place. When I think of my past, oh my God [her eyes became bigger] … what immense courage I had to face all those things. Since I am a woman, I think that I have still courage to face all kinds of problems. We women are anyway courageous ... aren't we? [Interview number 1: Tamil Christian].

In order to support the widows in their testimonials, I found it helpful to mention my personal experience of being involved with the war-affected people in refugee camps in Chettikulam in the North in 2009. After the war, many men in the camps were utterly disappointed and discouraged, (which is totally justifiable) when thinking of the tremendous suffering that they had to undergo in recent years. There were some women who underwent the same hardships as men, yet, on top of all their difficulties they had the courage to face life and found hope to start their lives from nothing.

5.2.3 The Challenges War-Widows Perceived

The term widowhood is common to both Sinhala and Tamil war-widows, yet it implies different things to each of them. This is mainly due to ethnicity and culture, which is intermingled with religion. It is therefore relevant to this study to compare the challenges faced by the war-widows of both ethnicities and both cultures. We already dealt with this on a theoretical level in the first chapter.

5.2.3.1 Being the Wife of a 'War Hero' or 'War Enemy'

As discussed in the first chapter, many Sinhalese, especially the Buddhists have the idea that SL belongs to the Sinhala Buddhists and that it is their great responsibility to protect the country from the 'enemy', the Tamils, who shared one of the three kingdoms of SL before colonialism. Belief in this mythology, constructed and perpetuated by the Sinhalese since independence, identified Sinhala soldiers as 'war heroes' and Tamil soldiers who fought for the rights of the Tamils as 'war enemies'.

The majority of the Sinhala people, including some Sinhala Buddhist monks who committed their lives to a non-violent religion, justified the war during the past years. Some Sinhala Catholic religious leaders, who preached to love one's enemy, did the same. The GoSL considered the Sinhala soldiers who fought against the 'enemy' and died in the war to be martyrs or war heroes. The following records are suitable examples

that can help understand the idea that many Sinhalese had of the Sinhala soldiers:

> After the death of my husband, people in this village made a monument with the advice of the Buddhist monk in the temple. For us he is a war hero, because he sacrificed his life for the nation and religion [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

> Since my husband was a soldier, people came to pay their respects to him. At the funeral service, the priest [Catholic priest] consoled us saying that he was a martyr for the country. Then I was proud of him [Interview number 9: Sinhala Christian].

During the war, facing the enemy and dying on the battlefield was considered to be brave, as a popular Sinhala song sung by Chandrika Siriwardena describes:

> If a Sinhala soldier is dead on the battlefield, essentially the scar of the blood will be on his front, but not on the back, because Sinhalese never die without facing the enemy bravely (English translation of the Sinhala song, "Yuda bima marune Sinhalayeku nam").

From this perspective, dying as a Sinhala soldier on the battlefield was considered to be very honourable by many Sinhalese. Accordingly, the wives of the soldiers too were honoured by the same people when they commemorated the soldiers. The same could be true of the Tamils who died fighting in the LTTE, but the fact is that having been 'defeated' by the GoSL as enemies of the Sinhalese, the Tamils are not free to commemorate the Tamil soldiers who fought as LTTE's with respect and honour. For example:

> The government brutally killed our people and we have no freedom to remember them. This year we wanted to have a Holy Mass for our loved ones who died in the war on the 18 of May, but we were stopped by the armed forces. If they can celebrate their heroes, why not us? Where is justice in this country? How long we have to suffer in this country? [Interview number 6: Tamil Christian].

The other side of the same story is that to be the wife of a 'Sinhala war hero' and the wife of a Tamil in general, and the wife of an LTTE member in particular, has totally different implications in Sri Lankan society. Sinhala war-widows of soldiers were regarded as very special by many Sinhalese, especially by the GoSL, while all the Tamil war-widows,

not just the wives of the LTTE members, were neglected by the GoSL and many Sinhalese in line with their negative attitude towards Tamils.

The Sinhala war-widows of the soldiers were awarded great public recognition because of the 'sacrificial lives' of their husbands, whereas the Tamil war-widows were marginalised by the Sinhalese. Hence, living with dignity in the Sinhala-dominated social structure had become a great concern for many Tamil war-widows. The most tragic side of the story was mentioned by a Tamil war-widow, namely that while the Sinhala war-widows together with the Sinhalese majority celebrated the war victory and the remembrance of the dead soldiers every year, Tamil war-widows did not even have the freedom to light a candle in public for their fallen ones. Instead, the GoSL had destroyed all the cemeteries of the LTTE. Some Tamil war-widows said that even though some of their family members were in the LTTE, they should have the right to remember them not only because they were the family members of surviving Tamils, but also because the commitment of the dead soldiers who had fought for the rights of the Tamils should not be forgotten:

> The members in the LTTE were our own people, our husbands, children and relatives. They fought for a better country for Tamils, so how can we forget what they did for us. Is it fair for us to do it? Since, I trust you, I am telling you these things … my son was in the LTTE and there were many relatives of mine in the movement. They are our people. Even though the government tries to delete our past memories by destroying the cemeteries, they cannot stop us thinking of our children, who died in the war. They are in our hearts forever. [Interview number 7: Tamil Christian]

5.2.3.2 Economic Strengths and Weaknesses

All the Sinhala wives of the members of the armed forces were economically better off because they received compensation as well as other financial and material support from the GoSL under the War-widows' and Orphans' Pension Scheme (armed forces).[48] It was evident from the interviews that many Sinhala war-widows did not choose to become employed and if some of them did decide to work that was due to personal interest or to some problems with their in-laws. All Sinhala war-widows

48 Widows' and Orphans' Pension Scheme (armed forces) is an act to establish and maintain a scheme for the granting of pensions to widows and children of deceased members of the armed forces in SL.

interviewed (except two), who had lost their husbands in the attacks of the LTTE, were supported by GoSL. A Sinhala widow said:

> After the death of my husband, I received compensation from the government. Then every month, I get more than Rs. 50,000 as a salary and I also get scholarships for my two children. They are studying in good schools. I can manage all the expenses with this money. But the only problem is that I do not have a house. As I told you if I have a piece of land, they [GoSL] will build a house for me [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

Unlike the Sinhala war-widows, many Tamil war-widows interviewed had to extend their careers as breadwinners as they had become poorer due to the loss of their husbands. As described in the first chapter, land grabbing and the loss of valuable belongings was an obvious problem in many parts of the North. As they did not have occupational skills, Tamil war-widows faced enormous challenges in the job market. This problem was also linked to their ethnicity and gender:

> I have to work very hard …. In the past five years, I did many jobs …. Some were very hard … last year I went to do canal working. Actually earlier, we never thought of doing that kind of a job…. They were branded as 'men's work, but now we cannot categorise them like that.… If we can earn something no matter what the job is.… I really do not worry about what society says, because I have to feed my children in order to survive …[Interview number 6: Tamil Christian].

Some war-widows were disappointed because some of their male colleagues who do the same work are paid better. Some of them mentioned that the government used to bring the workers from the South to work in the North, accordingly, many Tamils have lost many employment opportunities. Nevertheless, the findings of the fieldwork indicated that all the Tamil war-widows were engaged in different kinds of occupations including some risky jobs as they had no other means of survival.

5.2.3.3 Struggling to Overcome Memories of the War

Overcoming painful memories of the past was one of the main struggles almost all war-widows had to deal with. The pain and struggle of widows were expressed and revealed in different ways such as through tears, anger, depression, hope and resistance during the interviews.

A Tamil woman whose husband was missing shared her experience during the interview, she was confused as she did not know whether she was a widow or not.

> If I know for sure that he is dead, somehow I can accept it and face life. But this situation is terrible … I know there are many women in my village like me. They can understand my feeling … it's difficult to express my pain of living without knowing about what happened to my husband [Interview number 2: Tamil Christian].

Her voice was the voice of many Tamil women whose husbands and loved ones disappeared since the war. Tamil war-widows were struggling to overcome their memories of the war. Some interviews were done with the women who had been in the Vanni area during the last phase of the war, and who had experienced and seen the truth of the war that was concealed by the government media. As some of them mentioned, it was very difficult for them to recall the death not only of their husbands, but also of other loved ones, neighbours with whom they had shared their joys and sorrows and even the death of some small children who had asked help from them to escape the danger:

> During the wartime, we did not have freedom even to cry out loud. We had to hide all our pain within ourselves and to move to the other place over the dead bodies. They were our relations … friends … even small kids. When I remember all those things, [she covered her face with her hands] I cannot forgive myself. While we were crossing to the army side, my daughter was taken by them and still I do not know what happened to her. Sometimes I thought where God was while all these nasty things were happening to us [Interview number 7: Tamil Christian].

> I still cannot overcome the pain and anger when I remember what happened to my own sister. While we were crossing to the side of the army we had to forget that we were women. We know what really happened to us, especially to the women. It was terrible. I do not like to see the uniform of your soldiers [Sinhalese]. My sister was in the LTTE and the soldiers knew about her, so they did everything to destroy her mentally, physically and sexually. The pain is still within me. We do not want to live with them, but now we have to live in the presence of the military [Interview number 5: Tamil Christian].

As the war escalated, some were unable to pay attention to others, since they were also running for their lives. A few years after the war,

when war-widows were thinking of their past experience, they struggled internally to forgive themselves and – as they said – to forgive the armed forces responsible for their suffering. The Sinhala war-widows too had a negative attitude towards the LTTE and so did the Tamils themselves, thinking that they were responsible for the death of their husbands.

5.2.3.4 Being under Military Occupation

While the Sinhala war-widows did receive full recognition by the Sinhalese and by the GoSL, the Tamil war-widows were controlled and oppressed by the military in the North. As described in the first chapter, the military presence was a common reality in the North where the interviews took place. While the Tamils were struggling to overcome negative and painful experiences suffered at the hands of military forces – many Tamil war-widows had stories of painful experiences with armed forces in the past – they had to live their whole lives, even after the end of the war, in the presence of the military. The uniforms and guns of the soldiers, military vehicles, check points, army camps and their attitudes, all of which Tamil war-widows hated in the past had become part of their life again in the present. Two Tamil war-widows shared their feelings with regard to the military presence in their village:

> I hate to see the uniform of the soldiers. We have to take permission for everything. [Her face was aggressive] This is our village, not their [Sinhala soldiers] village, but we are like their slaves. Does the country not belong to us? The situation is very pathetic. If you are going to write something on our situation; tell that we are here like slaves. That is the real truth. There will be a day when we can live with dignity [Interview number 2: Tamil Christian].

> I get angry when I see our houses are occupied by the armed forces. [Since we had the interview in a Church, she showed me a house, saying], this is my house, but now soldiers are living there. They are not guilty at all. After the interview if we get a chance I will show you the place where I live with my children and mother-in-law. Many people are suffering due to land occupation, because some of our people have no documents to prove the ownership of the lands. How can you expect us to have those documents after a massacre? [Interview number 6: Tamil Christian].

The military presence was not a passive one. War-widows were closely watched by the military forces and they did not have freedom

in many areas of their lives – gatherings, involvements, meetings and remembering the dead. The major concern that many Tamil war-widows had was their security in the presence of the military forces due to their unhealed past memories, especially because of what they experienced during the last phase of the war.

5.2.3.5 Responsibility for the Children

Many war-widows interviewed had children. The death of a husband was a loss for a wife; the death of a father was a loss for a child. Both Sinhala and Tamil war-widows found it difficult to bring up their children in the absence of their husbands. In spite of the common hardships many war-widows had to cope with, Tamil war-widows had to face many additional problems due to economic hardships, unhealed past memories and many other factors. For example, as some war-widows shared, they had to look after their children while they were working. Since they had to bear the responsibility of their children, they were unable to give more time to their job and this resulted in more economic problems:

> My daughter does not like to stay home alone even for a short time because of her unhealed past memories. While we were running from one place to the other, my husband was shot dead and my daughter saw it. She saw how he was screaming at the last moment. She still remembers the last moment of her father and then she begins to cry. No one can stop her. She is stubborn. If you listen to our stories, you will realise how much we suffered during the past years and even now after five years of the end of war [Interview number 6: Tamil Christian].

In Sri Lankan society, people have the idea that when a woman becomes a mother, she has to give priority to her children rather than to herself. Many women have inherited this ideal of motherhood. Hence, some of the war-widows I met during the interviews were struggling to balance motherhood with the new role of widowhood and had faced many problems when they had to take decisions regarding remarriage. As a war-widow claimed:

> I personally do not want to marry again. I have an eighteen-year-old daughter … so, I never think of marrying again. [Interview number 5: Tamil Christian]

In some Tamil families, war-widows had to take care not only of their own children but also of the children of family members whose parent/s

had died in the war, and of their own elderly parents as well as the parents of their deceased husbands. Both Sinhala and Tamil war-widows had problems answering the questions raised by children about their deceased fathers. For example:

> My son is small. When I am unable to give something he needs, he says that if his father was there he would have done it for him. He simply says things as he is small, but those words pierce my heart. You know, when he sleeps, he used to keep a photo of my husband under his pillow. I cannot bear these things. It's really painful [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

> If my children saw the body of my husband, they should have accepted that their father was dead. The coffin was sealed and we did not see the body. He was really an innocent man, he was very sensitive. I had a seven year love-affair and I know who he was. But I do not know what happened to him after joining the army [Interview number 8: Sinhala Christian].

While war-widows were undergoing some psychological, economic, and social problems, they still had to bring up their children in order to try and secure a better future for them.

5.2.3.6 Extending the Boundaries beyond the Traditional Role of 'Wife'

As mentioned in the first chapter, Sri Lankan society is a patriarchal society where the head of the family is usually a man. There were many female heads of households in the country due to migration, the death of husbands, divorce, separation and some other reasons.[49] During the last few years, many families had become female-headed families due to the war. Since the headship of the family was associated with the husband or the eldest male member; changing the role of headship from a male to a female meant enormous challenges. The transition from being an ordinary wife to being a war-widow had made many women naturally the heads of households and participants in a dynamic labour market, thus moving away from the traditional role of women. As a widow said:

> When I was with my husband, he used to decide everything and I did whatever he asked. Earlier I thought that we women should allow our

49 Cf. A.M. Kumudika Adikaram Boyagoda, "Heterogeneity and Female-Headed Households in Sri Lanka: Vulnerability and Resilience in a Transitional Development," (University of Waikato, 2014): http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/8483/thesis.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y (accessed 2 September 2014).

> husbands to make all decisions, because they are the heads of families. I was not aware of my potential as a woman. But, now I am aware of many things that I can do as a woman [Interview number 6: Tamil Christian].

With the loss of their husbands, all the war-widows whom I met had become the heads of their families. While many Sinhala war-widows could rely on compensation offered by the government, many Tamil war-widows had become the sole breadwinners of their families. In both contexts, women had become the sole decision-makers, household managers, and protectors of the families, roles that had not been reserved to them in a traditional patriarchal family. As many war-widows were not familiar with the new roles of widowhood, they had to face various kinds of challenges with their new, unanticipated responsibilities. They also had to engage in 'work' with which they were not familiar, like fishing, canal work, road mending, banking, and attending to official matters.

5.2.3.7 Remarriage

Remarriage for a war-widow, as shown earlier, was not only a personal but also a cultural, social, religious and economic issue. As discussed in the second part of the first chapter, remarriage is a taboo for many Tamil war-widows. Her decision to remain single without remarriage was heavily governed by the norm or dictum found in the Tamil culture: 'one man for the whole life.' Sinhala war-widows had no such restriction on remarriage, but when they did remarry people displayed negative attitudes towards them, as a Sinhala widow mentioned [Interview number 10: Sinhala Christian]. Some war-widows recounted that many people think that war-widows long for sexual pleasure and that is why they want to marry again. In society's eyes war-widows with daughters had to think twice before remarrying because of the fear that the new man might be a threat to the safety of their daughter(s) or that she would become a victim of violence.

However, both Sinhalese and Tamil had to face challenges from their parents, neighbours and religious leaders on contemplating remarriage. For example:

> Anyway, I decided to marry again in 2010. When I went to the parish priest to tell him about this, he was not happy. He told me that there was no problem to marry again, but asked me to think of my daughter's future …he told me that the wellbeing of the child was more important than my desire [Interview number 10: Sinhala Christian].

War-widows in a situation of social and cultural taboos had to undergo hardships when deciding whether to remarry or to remain single.

> All my family members and relatives asked me not to marry again because they think that it is not for a woman to think of another marriage [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

> Our village monk asked me not to think of another marriage since I am a mother of a daughter. Do they say the same for men? I do not think ….They expect all sacrifices only from women [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

In short, many war-widows interviewed were faced with the dilemma of whether or not to abide by male dominated social, cultural and religious norms on remarriage or to decide freely on what suited them. More precisely, they were caught between two options: to become the victims of patriarchal structures or to be agents who had the courage to make their own decisions.

5.2.3.8 Security Problems

Both groups of war-widows had to face problems of safety and security as they had to live in the absence of husbands. They shared how men in both cultures tried to take advantage of war-widows, thinking that the women were readily available for sexual relationships at any time and that some men considered women to be sexual objects and tried to fulfil their selfish needs by abusing war-widows:

> One day, my child was not well and I happened to ask a neighbour's vehicle to take him to a doctor. He came and helped me well, but after a week he was telling me that he wanted to come to me when the children go to school. I refused him very firmly. Then he threatened me, but I said 'no'. After that, he spread news in the village that a man came to me when my children were out. No one understood me. All blamed me, even my parents. I was quite disturbed and depressed. You have to be very careful when you get any help from men, because very often they expect something in return [Interview number 13: Sinhala Buddhist].

Compared to the Sinhala war-widows, Tamil war-widows feared for their safety because of the presence of the military and the lack of security in their houses – some Tamil war-widows did not have strong doors to secure their houses. This is made clear in the following statements:

> Even now before coming to meet you, I asked one lady to stay at home with my daughter, because some army personnel were around the area. I cannot trust anyone [Interview number 7: Tamil Christian].

> Since you are a nun, I will share something very personal. I was raped several times by different persons and I really did not want to live and decided to commit suicide, yet I have to live because of my three children. When my husband was with me, he protected me always. One day, I still remember, when a man teased me, my husband got angry and beat him; he was so conscious of my security and the dignity, but, now ... [Interview number 4: Tamil Christian].

Many war-widows had to be careful about their personal security at home, workplace and elsewhere.

5.2.3.9 The Customs, Rituals and Rules of the Religion and the Culture

As mentioned in the first chapter, cultures and religions in SL are intermingled with one another due to which women in their roles of mothers, wives, grandmothers and widows are controlled by lots of customs, rituals and rules. Many widows shared how these existing customs and rituals negatively affected them in their daily living.

> When my daughter came of age my family members did not allow me to bathe my child [the ritual bathing is a puberty right in the Sinhalese culture] and do the other rituals since I am a widow [Interview number 17: Sinhala Buddhist].

All war-widows suffered due to the unjust social, religious and cultural system – patriarchy in Sri Lankan society enforces gender roles that are inhuman and humiliating. Both Tamils and Sinhalese had their own particular cultures. Compared to Sinhala cultural norms, the Tamil social system of patriarchy enforces insensitive restrictions on the lives of war-widows. Being a widow in the Tamil culture was more undesirable than in the Sinhala culture. Tamil widows shared, for example, that it was easy to recognise a woman as a widow in her own culture as widows were not allowed to wear the *tali, pottu,* colourful *sarees* and flowers which are allowed only for women whose husbands are alive.

> Even though I am a widow I used to wear *tali, pottu* and colourful *sarees*. I am still very young and how can people expect me to behave like a traditional widow. I know that people say many things, I do not mind them. Why others worry about my dress code? [Interview number 1: Tamil Christian].

Compared to Hindu Tamils, Christian Tamils had less rituals and customs due to the impact of some Christian teachings on respect, love and acceptance of people without any discrimination. Despite some religious teachings that encourage people to respect one another, all war-widows, especially Tamils, were restricted and restrained from attending 'auspicious events'. Widows had to face various kinds of challenges and changes in their society and culture when they became war-widows. Nevertheless the responses of both Buddhist and Christian widows showed resistance to the oppressive customs, rituals and rules in their own religions and cultures. The responses further revealed that religion or culture or any other element in their society should lead people to accept everyone as a human being, without any discrimination based on gender, sex, ethnicity or religion.

> Even though many of us can use religion as a weapon to change this society, we don't take that responsibility, instead being followers of our religions, we just keep silent. I do not think that my religion should help people only to be pious but more than that it should be a guide to promote peace, unity and respect for each and everyone in the society [Interview number 6: Tamil Christian].

5.2.4 The Obstacles War-Widows Faced in Society

5.2.4.1 Obstacles from War-Widows' Parents

Some parents, especially the parents of the Tamil war-widows forced them to follow the customs and rituals of culture and religion as they had inherited them.

> When we were in the camp, one night a man came to our hut and tried to take me out. Since he had covered his face, we could not recognise him. We were even scared to make a complaint, so we kept silent. From that day onwards, my mother used to stay with me and she even does not allow me to go alone. I try to understand her, but I need my freedom [Interview number 2: Tamil Christian].

> I am the only child in my family, so my parents are over-protective. It is a burden for me. Since I am a girl, even in my childhood, I did not have the freedom to do what I wanted. My parents always asked me to behave like a modest girl. Even though I did not agree with the things that they asked me to do, I obeyed them. But now, I need my freedom to decide because I know how to handle myself [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

A few war-widows shared that their parents and family members were more concerned about adhering to the social norms and customs rather than their wellbeing. While speaking about the freedom to remarry, some widows said that especially remarriage and employment were issues of control by their parents.

5.2.4.2 Obstacles from Parents-in-Law

Although it is less an issue today than in the past, problems between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are still prevalent in Sri Lankan society. Some war-widows shared that they were always monitored and controlled by their parents-in-law, especially when they lived with them after the death of their husbands. A woman noted that:

> As soon as I became a widow, my parents-in-law asked me to change my way of living. They asked me to change my way of dressing. I was told not to wear the *pottu, tali,* and colourful *sarees* [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

A few parents-in-law directly or indirectly had asked war-widows to find a new place to live as they did not want their daughters-in-law to live in their homes after the death of their sons. One Sinhala war-widow shared that she had to give the compensation she received for the death of her husband to her parents-in-law [Interview number 8: Sinhala Christian]. Even though a person's freedom is essential in life, some war-widows were controlled by their parents-in-law and not allowed to make decisions of their own. The most unacceptable accusation that parents-in-law made against their daughters-in-law was that widows were the cause of their husbands' death. Many Buddhist parents-in-law blamed widows for the death of their husbands, due to the bad *kamma* or bad luck of women.

5.2.4.3 Obstacles from the Culture/Society

Many Tamil war-widows shared that they were not only marginalised and oppressed by the GoSL and military forces, but also by their own people in their own culture. As they identified the difference of being a 'widow' and a 'widower' in their culture, war-widows questioned why only women are being discriminated against:

> Now see … when a man becomes a widower nobody can recognise him as a widower. No rituals for him like for us. Everything is for women. Why is that? I hate … we have to do something to change these ideas [Interview number 6: Tamil Christian].

Many Tamil and Sinhala widows said that people in society marginalised them, considering them to be persons bringing bad luck to the family and society. As discussed in the second part of the first chapter, in Tamil culture war-widows are considered inauspicious, whereas the women who live with their husbands and children are considered auspicious. On the basis of this premise, war-widows are not allowed to move among the people at auspicious events like everybody else. Young war-widows were even forced to behave like traditional war-widows and follow all the harmful cultural and religious customs and rituals. According to some war-widows, for many people culture is more important than the dignity of war-widows.

A few Tamil war-widows stated that people in their own society used to speak against them when they went beyond the prevailing customs and rituals of society:

> Once, a woman told me "don't you know our culture? You cannot dress like this [wearing colourful *sarees*, which is not allowed for war-widows in Tamil culture]. People are saying many things about you … so follow the customs." [Interview number 4: Tamil Christian].

> To speak honestly, I was in the LTTE for some time and we were totally against the traditional view of women in our culture. We fought for our rights; we were against the dowry system. We had the freedom in the movement and we were not considered as secondary to men. We were equally treated as men in the society. But now our people have forgotten everything and they try to impose all the harmful cultural norms on us [Interview number 5: Tamil Christian].

Some Sinhala war-widows shared that people sometimes did not want to encounter them when they were about to attend a special or an auspicious event. A widow claimed:

> It's very sad that my own people, even my relatives consider me as a bad omen. One day, a woman was coming from her house and I happened to be in front of her gate. Then her face changed and immediately, she turned and went to the other side. I was hurt by that incident [Interview number 15: Sinhala Buddhist].

Some war-widows, however, were wearing the *tali* and *pottu*, did remarry and worked in fields, which was traditionally not accepted, they attended auspicious events (which they were not allowed to do in their own cultures), related to men, took on new types of leadership and fulfilling new roles.

A few Buddhist war-widows said that their own people had the idea that they had beome war-widows due to the bad *kamma* of their past life, while some Christians considered widowhood to be a punishment from God. Yet many Tamil and Sinhala war-widows questioned why their own people unjustly blame them for the death of their husbands. As a widow stated, "[O]nly those who have experienced pain can understand the pain of others" [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

5.2.5 War-Widows' Involvement with Supportive People in Society

Although war-widows were oppressed and neglected by their society, culture and religion, they found ways to form support groups and to find support from others. The following section will deal with different support groups in society. In these support groups, war-widows provide each other with various types of assistance, often non-professional, to feel more empowered and experience a sense of belonging.

5.2.5.1 Female-Headed Associations/ War-Widows' Associations

All the Tamil war-widows interviewed were involved in female-headed associations or other associations of war-widows. Five Sinhala war-widows out of eleven were involved in war-widows'/women's associations. Four of them were Buddhists [Interview numbers 14, 15, 17, 18] and only one of them was a Christian [Interview number 9]. The findings proved that the Tamil war-widows were more involved in female-headed associations than the Sinhala war-widows.

1) The Involvement of Tamil War-Widows in the Female-Headed Associations

The grassroots movements of female-headed associations were very powerful in some villages in the North and the East. Tamils were neglected and oppressed in the country and even some Tamil political parties were not very interested in the rights of the Tamils. The grassroots movements of women's associations had become a strong forum for women's independence. Taking a stand against unjust social violence in Sri Lankan society as isolated individuals means running a risk.

> There are many women in my village whose husbands are missing. So, we used to come together and discuss our experiences. We all went to look for

> our husbands. We were afraid to go alone to the army or to the detention camps. Wherever we went…we used to go as a group. It's strength for us [Interview number 2: Tamil Christian].

Working together as an inter-religious, inter-ethnic and inter-class body of people is more powerful than working alone. One of the important aspects of female-headed associations was the opportunity for women to come together as inter-religious, inter-ethnic and inter-caste groups that had been separate before the war, for the common goal of working together for their liberation.

> After working with Tamil war-widows, I was able to understand the pain and struggle of Tamils. Honestly, we were ignorant of the struggles of the Tamils and accordingly, we had a wrong picture of them [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

The war-widows took the opportunity to come together as women with many similar experiences. Despite their marginalisation in society and culture, war-widows were fulfilling new roles as breadwinners, decision-makers and risks-takers.

> Now we know each other. We are close to each other. There are very good friends in the association. Whatever happens, I used to share it with them. Since they too are war-widows, it is easy for them to understand my life. The person who is having the wounds only knows the pain. It is a real advantage for us to learn how to cope with our problems. I look forward to go to the meetings every other Sunday. It gives me life [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

Many war-widows related how when they came together they shared the experience of being widowed, the changes that they had to face after the death of their husbands, their hopes, expectations, successes and faith experiences. For them, this kind of sharing had helped them not only to cope with their oppression, but also to resist the oppressive social structures that dehumanise them.

> In spite of all the restrictions we have, we come together every Sunday in one of our member's house. All the time soldiers come and observe what is going on. Last week when we had the meeting, we decided to make an appeal to get back our lands from the armed forces. We know that it is not an easy task, yet they should give us back what belongs to us. It is unethical for them to occupy our own lands when we suffer with meagre facilities.

> Since, we are a group, we have courage to stand for our rights, but we do not know what will be the repercussion. We will see [Interview number 1: Tamil Christian].

The membership of the associations sometimes gave war-widows the opportunity to participate in awareness programmes, workshops and gatherings where they received help to overcome their pains and struggles and to become aware of their dignity. Some war-widows were conscious of the skills, strengths and power of their womanhood. The war-widows were challenged by one another and in the process have gained the courage to rethink oppressive cultural, religious and social restrictions. They began to think about themselves as agents with the potential to cope with the new changes they faced.

Since the customs and rituals did not allow Tamil war-widows to behave like the other women who live with their husbands, many Tamil war-widows interviewed took the opportunity to take part in their own associations the way they did before they were widowed, that is, with *pottu* and *tali* and flowers for their hair. They thus experienced some kind of freedom, release and joy in being members of those associations. In spite of the hardships war-widows underwent in day-to-day life, one war-widow spoke courageously about her power to face life and her readiness to start life from the ashes.

> Your rulers [rulers of the GoSL] may think that we were defeated. We have heard the way that they celebrated the war victory. We are not defeated. Not at all, we still have the courage to face reality, but they do not have courage to face reality. That is why they are not revealing the truth. One day we will win our rights and live peacefully in our homeland. The truth shall make us free [Interview number 5: Tamil Christian].

The fieldwork indicated that as members of women's associations, Tamil war-widows had come to some important realisations:

- As citizens of the country, they had a right to live as citizens, and right could not be devalued on the basis of ethnicity or gender.
- They had a right to know the true stories of the war – what happened to the Tamil people, including their husbands/sons/daughters and family members.
- The strength of women when they were united.

- War-widows are human beings who have dignity. Becoming a war-widow did not devalue their womanhood.
- Awareness of the potential of women is a very important element in life.
- In a male dominated society, women are forced to take on cultural and religious taboos as something God-given.
- Some had realised that their marginalisation is not the will of God.
- Becoming a widow is different from becoming a widower. Many customs, rituals, rules are only for women, but not for men.
- Women are stronger than men in facing life.
- The empowerment of women can change one's own life and even the whole society.
- Becoming a mother does not mean that a woman always has to be limited to her own family.
- A woman's world is bigger than family life. Women can be involved in matters outside the home.
- The importance of being united with 'others' while affirming the right to self-determination for true reconciliation (inter-religious, inter-ethnic involvement).
- Some war-widows had become aware of their past experiences of working as women, and, as a result had been able to overcome some of the obstacles caused by culture and religion,
- One of the women interviewed had become aware of women's movements in other parts of the world.
- Some war-widows had realised that the efforts they made had changed society positively.

Having become aware of the above mentioned facts, Tamil war-widows took steps to overcome restrictions on war-widows.

Steps taken by the Tamil war-widows to deepen the awareness

- Standing against state oppression as a group of women. There were some war-widows who were working with inter-ethnic groups in order to raise the voice of justice against the violence of the GoSL. Some women had been courageous in coming out to demonstrate

publicly and to question the government on disappearances and land grabbing.

- Coming together as 'women' while going beyond ethnic, cultural, religious and class restrictions.
- Becoming aware of the androcentric cultural and religious restrictions of widowhood.
- War-widows had broken down some of the restrictions proving that they had the right to decide what was right for them.
- Behaving like other women in society. Becoming a widow does not devalue one's dignity. Therefore, many of them had gained the courage to distance themselves from the traditional way of looking at widowhood/womanhood.
- Being aware of the repercussions of breaking cultural and religious taboos, rituals and norms, war-widows interviewed had taken risks to break these taboos, rituals and norms when it was necessary and had faced the consequences courageously.
- While cultures or religions put women/war-widows down, they had learned to stand against them courageously.
- Expressing their own views openly when necessary, especially to the government authorities, despite all restrictions.
- Supporting war-widows who were dealing positively with their widowhood or taking risks to break some restrictions of the cultures and religions.
- Empowering war-widows through helping/challenging them to change their wrong ideas, attitudes and helping them recognise their potential as women.
- Conscientise war-widows, other women, men, religious leaders and children to see women as human beings, not inferior to men, sex objects, a result of bad *kamma* of a previous life or weak persons.
- Promoting self-employment and small-scale joint businesses.
- Helping one another to build houses because it is expensive to hire people for work.

2) The Involvement of Sinhala War-Widows in the Female-Headed Associations

As noted in the first part of this chapter, the need for Sinhala war-widows to come together as war-widows or as female heads of households was less than that of the Tamil war-widows. Hence, it is important to examine the reason/s behind this phenomenon.

Tamil women had more issues to address than the Sinhalese. Unlike Sinhala war-widows, Tamil war-widows had to find solutions for displacement, disappearance, land grabbing, arrests and Sinhalisation of the Tamil society. Tamil war-widows are well aware that forming grassroots-level groups of women with similar experiences, is the only available low-risk means to cope with their issues. Furthermore, Tamil war-widows, being a minority in the country, do not get economic or political support from the GoSL as Sinhala war-widows do. Tamil women suffer more violence than Sinhala women, just because they are Tamils.

A Sinhala Christian war-widow [Interview number 9] stated during her interview that she was involved in an inter-ethnic and inter-religious women's association that precisely as a group was trying to build bridges between Sinhala and Tamil war-widows. She also mentioned her struggle to make a decision to join Tamil war-widows:

> I was struggling for several days and months. Am I going to join the people who killed my husband and brother? However, after a few weeks, I decided to work together with Tamil war-widows who had the same pain as mine [Interview number 9: Sinhala Christian].

A Buddhist Sinhala widow related that she belonged to an inter-religious association, which at that moment was planning to extend their solidarity to war-widows in the North:

> Now we are planning to gather Tamil war-widows from the North and Sinhala war-widows like me from the South. Then we can share our experiences. That will be the first step. We as a group are working for that. I believe our small efforts can very much change our society [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

Another Sinhala Buddhist war-widow, who lived in the Eastern part of the country where both Sinhalese and Tamils live, testified that she was involved in politics and also in an inter-religious and inter-ethnic group. She said:

> I believe that when we come together, there is strength among us. That is why I try to unite women together. In this village each and every woman is involved at least in one association. We can energise one another. That is our hope. We belong to different religions, ethnicities, castes, yet we feel that we all are in the same boat in our life journey. Here, we learn how to respect other religions, how to listen to the different views of women and how to work together as one family. If not, we know that we cannot reach our goal, because we all have a dream to live as free people [Interview number 17: Sinhala Buddhist].

There was also a Sinhala Buddhist war-widow [Interview number 18] who had taken the initiative to heal the pain of war-widows through meditation and to empower them to face life. The step that this widow had taken could not change the whole society at once. Yet she, with other war-widows, gradually challenged the dominating structures through proclaiming that all had the right to live a respectable life in the country, without any discrimination. Their examples show of the importance of working together while moving beyond society's man-made criteria.

5.2.5.2 Supportive People in Work Places

As table 1 indicated, all Tamil war-widows who were breadwinners were working in different places. For Tamil war-widows to become breadwinners meant a big challenge. It was a new experience for them all, except for one Tamil widow who already was a teacher before the death of her husband. Besides the challenges that they had to face in some workplaces, many war-widows started thinking about life, their capabilities as women, and their attitudes regarding having an occupation in a new way. They now had the opportunity to be open to the whole society and to adopt a broader outlook. When they worked together they encountered people with different views, ideologies and behaviours and gradually learned to listen to others and to cope with changes in life. They had to mingle with men outside their home environment, which was not as common in Tamil culture as in Sinhala culture.

According to the testimonies of war-widows, some men and women in the work place did not discriminate against war-widows and did not consider them to be persons bringing bad luck. For example, during auspicious events in places of work, the war-widows had been invited to perform rituals they were not allowed to perform in their own culture. A widow said:

> The people in my work place never consider me as a bad omen. Can you believe a few times I did *arathi* too [a way of welcoming honourable people or guests at a special event/function. In Tamil culture, war-widows are not allowed to do *arathi* since they are considered a bad omen] at some special functions in the factory. War-widows are not allowed to do these things but I did. I was so happy [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

As was mentioned earlier, not all wives of soldiers did have to work, because they were financially secure. Yet, there were Sinhala war-widows who did need to work for a living [Interview number 8, 11, 16, 17]. One Sinhala widow [Interview number 10] despite being financially well off, wanted to get a job because she was forbidden to do so in her previous marriage. Thus, after her remarriage, she decided to open a salon in order to be financially independent from her new husband. The experience of working outside the home gave the women a kind of self-esteem and self-confidence because they were no longer dependent on their husbands' salary or their parents' property:

> Now I too am earning like my husband and I am really proud of it. After the death of my first husband, I learnt to stand on my own. It was not easy, but now I am used to it. Freedom is more important than money and property. Since, I am also earning, my present husband cannot control me [Interview number 10: Sinhala Christian].

Another Sinhala war-widow had a similar experience with regard to work:

> Many people in our society think that a woman has to be at home, especially if she happens to be a mother. We are discouraged to go for work. However, when we do not earn, we have to depend on husbands for everything. But sometimes, because of our dependency they try to control us [Interview number 8: Sinhala Christian].

Despite the risks that war-widows had to take – gender violence and competition in the job market – they appreciated the freedom that they had as breadwinners. They shared that once they had become the breadwinners of their families, they became decision-makers of the family as well. This gave them a status they had not had earlier in life.

5.2.5.3 The Supportive People for War-Widows

Some Tamil war-widows appreciated the presence of some Catholic priests and religious nuns in moments of their need.

> I admire some of our priests who had to sacrifice their lives; they were with us till the last moment. And also some are working for people in these areas. In a special way, I appreciate the dedication of the Bishop of Mannar (Bishop Rayappu Joseph). He is the only bishop who had the courage to stand for the rights of our people. Some of your Sinhala bishops … I do not like to mention their names; they do not think of us who are oppressed by the government, instead they support the government. This is the reality of our Church. We are also a part of the Church, but they have neglected us [Interview number 2: Tamil Christian].

While some war-widows were marginalised in the Church, there were a few priests, religious nuns and some men and women in different associations who acknowledged the war-widows' dignity, strengthening them to face life. War-widows appreciated them for they not only did humanitarian work – distributing money, goods and houses – but more than that they had been a source of strength for them to overcome suffering and work together for a political solution to the ethno-national conflict between the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

While the majority of Buddhist monks promoted the war, a war-widow told of a Buddhist monk who had challenged her not to consider Tamils as enemies of the Sinhalese.

> One day, when my husband was in the war-field, I went to the monk in our temple and asked him to make a wish to win the war. Can you believe that, that particular monk told me that Tamils are not our enemies …? "We Buddhists cannot have enemies … We have to love them … Being Buddhists, we cannot promote war. We will make a wish for peace all over the country. The victory over Tamils does not give us peace. Being a monk who follows the teachings of the Buddha, I cannot make a bad wish for anyone in this world. There is no one called 'other' because we all are one, so there is no enemy" [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

While a Sinhala war-widow was blamed for her husband's death, her own father's words had given her courage to face life. She re-counted:

> Some of our Buddhists have an idea that my husband died because of my bad luck. You know, even my parents-in-law have the same idea. It is painful. Then I asked my father, "am I the reason for my husband's death?" I loved my father very much. Then he embraced me and began to cry. He told me "for me, you are the luckiest person in this world. Do not think that you are responsible for the death of your husband. Your husband died because of the cruel war [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

The war-widows appreciated the moral support that they received from the religious leaders, friends, relatives and family members who had encouraged them to face life.

5.2.6 The Views of War-Widows on Religion and God

When I asked, "how does your religion affect the way you face your life?" the war-widows reacted in different ways before they started to share their views.

- Religion was not a topic that could easily be discussed [Interview numbers 4, 8 and 14].
- It was not pleasant to speak about the way women are oppressed by religion. [Interview number 11].
- Anger in speaking about religion [Interview numbers 2 and 15].
- As many of them required some time to think before they answered, it was a 'big issue' [Interview numbers 10 and 12].
- Some were not interested in speaking about religion [Interview numbers 3 and 17].
- Some of the war-widows expressed their views without any hesitation [Interview numbers 1, 5, 7, 9, 13 and 16]
- It was an important issue for some of them [Interview numbers 6, 7 and 18].

As the findings indicate, for some war-widows religion is not an important issue. For others, even though they had something to say about their religion, it was difficult to identify what religion really meant. Some war-widows found it difficult to differentiate between the teachings of their religious founders and the present day practices of their religion. Some of them were confused about the question – they were unsure whether the question regarded teachings of religious founders or the religion that they experience today. Many of them said that religion was an important tool that could change society positively, but many of them did not see it happening. Some war-widows said that religion was man-made and did not help them in resisting the way society oppressed them as women, especially as war-widows [Interview numbers 10, 17]. Many had the idea that women were oppressed by religion.

> I do not feel that we, women are fully respected in our religion. I think that not only in our own religion but also in many other religions … Sometimes, I feel that religion is the main reason for the oppression of women in society. Isn't it? [Interview number 11: Sinhala Christian].

5.2.6.1 The Views of Christian War-Widows on Religion and God/s

1) The Views of Christian War-Widows on Religion

Some Christian war-widows shared how they were 'enlightened and inspired by gospel values' and were able to face challenges and to commit themselves to many works of charity, justice and peace. Some had taken practical decisions based on the teachings of Jesus to live their Christianity meaningfully. They said that they did not want to follow the Church leaders who often (mis)guide them or give false interpretations of the teaching of Jesus. They did not want to be nominal Christians and be oppressed by the 'institutional' Church, but rather real followers of Jesus.

> The Christians who confess that they are the followers of Jesus should live according to the vision of Jesus who respected women breaking the patriarchal barriers in his time. What is visible in today's Church is that all male religious leaders of the Church consider us as secondary to them and marginalise us because we are lay people, especially because we are women. Many of them do not live what they preach [Interview number 10: Sinhala Christian].

> I am not an educated person, but according to my understanding, as Christians we have to live according to the values of Jesus, who accepted everyone without any discrimination. As a widow, in my suffering I reflect on my life as never before. For me, love is more important than rules and regulations [Interview number 7: Tamil Christian].

Many war-widows felt that they were marginalised, isolated and neglected by the Church. Also, that they were discriminated against in the Church by some of the religious leaders and some parishioners.

> One day we, women and men, were working for a religious function. When I do something, I do it whole-heartedly. That is my nature (Her eyes were very expressive). That particular day, at the last moment, one person was asking me not to come forward because I am a widow. I felt so sorry and more than that I got angry. When I worked hard they did not tell me anything, but at last, they rejected me in the Church premises. Immediately, I looked at the person with an angry face and turned towards the priest.

> I hope that the man got my message. I can understand them, but the most painful thing was that the priest who was standing there did not say even a word. He simply smiled and left [Interview number 1: Tamil Christian].

Many widows expressed that a person who says that one is a believer implies that one has to live the teachings of the particular religious founder. Many war-widows felt that it was not enough to say that they were Christians and not practise loving, respecting, and treating one another equally. For them, religion should promote peace and unity among people. Some of them could not see these values practised in the Church and among the people who attend Mass. They saw the contradiction between what some religious leaders preached and practised. As a result some war-widows did not even want to pray to God alongside them.

For all war-widows the values of the reign of God were more important than the rituals, customs and rules of the Church, as many of them had the idea that religion should help them live their humanity meaningfully in accordance with such values. It is their understanding, that if religion does not help them to live their vocation as Christians with dignity, belonging to such a religion is meaningless. They could, however, live according to the teachings of their religious founders.

There were war-widows who believed that the survival of a religion depended mainly on women and that there would be no religion without women. At the same time they had come to realise that religion was one of the means of oppressing women in society. Some of them were disappointed about the exclusive language that was used in the Churches during Mass and other prayer services. When they went to Mass they came out feeling disturbed either because they were badly treated in the Church or because the sermon was 'uninteresting'. Some had decided not to go to Church or Mass. Some had decided to go to the Church and pray while there was no one there. Some felt that going to the Church was not necessary as God is with them even at home. There were a few war-widows who did not have time for Sunday Mass as they had to earn money for their survival.

The teaching of the Church on wives had disturbed some war-widows – especially being treatment as a second-class person. A few war-widows felt that they were suppressed because of their roles as wives, and especially as mothers. One widow had doubts about the authenticity of the Bible – "does the Bible consist of the word of God? If so, why does

the Bible encourage oppression of wives?" [Interview number 10: Sinhala Christian]. One Sinhala widow shared what she heard a priest was saying at the funeral service of a woman she knew:

> "This mother [the dead body] was a very good mother. I knew her very well. She was very much faithful to her marriage promises till the end of her life. She always obeyed her husband. Not like the wives of the present, she did not argue with her husband. Our women in the present society do not know how to control their mouths and as a result, they create many problems in the family and sometimes in the parish. It is easy to work with men but not with women. Even though her husband was not right, she did not say anything against him. She respected her husband. That was the secret of her good family life." When I heard these words of the priest, I got angry with him. See his attitude towards women [Interview number 8: Sinhala Christian].

Some war-widows stated that they did not want to waste their time on Church matters as they had to attend to other important matters in their lives. For example:

> In our religion, what are the important matters – how to receive communion, wearing the veil, healing services, pilgrimages and many other external things. When bishops change, religious practices also change. They think that we do not know these issues. We know everything in detail, but we do not want to waste our time on these kinds of issues, because we have many important things to attend to [Interview number 9: Sinhala Christian].

Some war-widows who were actively involved in their Churches had given up, because they were marginalised by their fellow-believers. Also for some, it was more important to uphold the dignity of women than to engage in Church activities, because the Church was not interested in the dignity of women. Many war-widows had begun to think of their religion in a new way as they had become aware of how it marginalised war-widows.

When asked about religion, many of them spoke about their religious leaders or practices of the Church. Most of them were really disappointed with their religious leaders, yet some Tamils appreciated some of their religious leaders for being with them even during the worst time of the war. The following were the responses given by the Sinhala and Tamil war-widows when asked about their religious leaders:

- Lack of availability to listen to the different views coming from ordinary people, especially from women. Some religious leaders have the idea that they know everything and every follower of their religion has to accept whatever they say.
- The silence about the injustice happening to the people, including war-widows/women.
- Even though religious leaders have the ability to address issues of violence or the cultural and religious discrimination against men and women, they do not think it necessary to do so. Many of them remain silent, thereby enabling discrimination.
- Some Sinhala Catholic religious leaders identify themselves with the government and support them in discriminating against Tamils. Sometimes they take the side of the oppressive government rather than the side of the Tamils and Sinhalese who are oppressed.
- Discouragement about the way they guide people, especially their insensitivity to the lives of the marginalised and isolated.
- Their main concern is Church activities, rituals and laws, rather than giving priority to cultivating the values of the reign of God or the dignity of persons.
- Disappointment about their giving priority to external things – rituals, customs, rules, wasting money on Church decorations and functions.
- Their negative attitude with regard to the dignity of war-widows/ women.
- Encouraging some oppressive customs and rituals with regard to war-widows.
- Misunderstanding war-widows' decisions.
- Disappointment regarding the over-emphasis on liturgy rather than on the sacredness of life.
- Preventing them from practising their religion freely by forcing rules and regulations on them.
- Religious leaders try to control war-widows/women who do not want to be controlled by their leaders.
- Religious leaders preach about God – a loving, merciful, listening God – but they do not practise this.

The answers indicate that women, especially war-widows, felt that they were isolated and neglected in the Church due to their gender and widowhood. Women's subordination was common to the Tamil and Sinhala cultures and the Church. War-widows, wives, mothers and young girls are the most oppressed. The war-widows who shared their ideas about religion claim that the Church should not neglect the mission of Jesus who respected women and men equally. They also said that the Church would need to disassociate herself from ideologies and prejudices against women and to work at affirming the fullness of human life. The responsibility of the Church is to make the government aware of its duty to protect the lives of these women as well as to create a better environment for them to live in, to highlight the reality of their suffering and to strive for justice.

Many war-widows expressed the view that rules and regulations, customs and rituals are useless if they do not help believers to experience the love of God. In the view of many war-widows, the rituals themselves are not the problem, as each religion has them, but they should help believers experience God in peace of mind and in freedom.

Speaking about Christian religious leaders, war-widows expected them to be available to believers, to be sensitive to the marginalised and help believers to practise religion without deterring them with various kinds of rituals and customs. War-widows preferred freedom of worship. If prayers meant a relationship between God and human beings, some war-widows said, it was important for them to have the freedom to decide how they want to relate to God. They wanted their religious leaders to seek an inclusive approach to society.

According to some war-widows, the voice of the Church must awaken the people to the prophetic mission of the First and Second Testaments in the Bible. That could thus not be a voice, which supports the prevailing political or economic structures.[50] Some war-widows raised the following questions: did the Church, including religious leaders and believers, look at this ethnic problem between the Sinhalese and the Tamils with the eyes of true followers of Christ? Did the Baptismal vocation of Christians in SL lead them to be witnesses to the priestly, prophetic and pastoral ministry

50 This does not mean that the Church is separated from worldviews but that the Church's behaviour has to be based on the biblical values of truth, justice and equity with regard to social and political matters.

of Jesus Christ? Did the Church stand for the rights of the oppressed or does it oppress people who stand for the rights of the oppressed? Was the Church sensitive or insensitive to the struggle of war-affected people, and especially of women who are the most oppressed of the victims? Was the Church motivated by the power of God to empower the oppressed people or by the power of political leaders to support them in suppressing minorities in the country? What is the responsibility of the Church towards thousands of war-victims? Could the Church be indifferent to this situation or can it be a voice to bring just and true peace to all without dividing the Church into Tamil Christians and Sinhala Christians?

2) The Views of Christian War-Widows on God

- When asking the war-widows for their views about God, some of them were excited and some felt that it was too 'big' a question for them to answer – something beyond their capacity.

- All of them, except one widow, spoke about God in the singular. Another widow was confused about the concept of God/s – no God, one God or many Gods. For one widow, God was a power within that guided her towards the truth [Interview number 9: Sinhala Christian].

- Almost all women had faith in God, but the way they expressed the nature of God was different from the existing dominant ideas of God.

- For many, religion and God were two different things.

- Some of them spoke about God as a Mother with some feminine attributes instead of the image of God as a Father [Interview numbers 4 and 6: Tamil Christians].

- Many war-widows believed in a God who is merciful, listening to them and journeying with them in their lives – a God who is struggling with them.

- Some had the idea that God too had forsaken them while they were undergoing hardships during the war. They had changed their ideas about God as a result of their lived experience.

- For some the love of God gave them life.
- Some had the idea that only God could understand them well.
- For many, loving God and loving one's neighbour should go together. If someone was unable to love her/his neighbour, it meant that she/he could not love God because the love of God and the love of neighbour were like two sides of the same coin.
- For many of them, God was far away from the tabernacles in the Churches. Therefore, going to Church and meeting God were two different things.
- The qualities that they attributed to God had influenced them to change their lifestyle, attitudes and vision.
- Their expressions regarding God went beyond the rituals, customs and rules of their religion.
- Some of them found that with God everything is possible: not because God is a magician, but because they had found courage to face everything in their lives because God was journeying with them. The presence of God was important for them.
- Some of them had very powerful ways of experiencing God while they were helping one another despite the hardships during wartime. They had experienced the presence of God in one another.

All these answers could be summed up in what one Tamil widow shared:

> I still remember the day when we were in Mullivaikkal. I did not have anything to give my youngest child who was crying miserably. Then can you believe one woman came to us with some biscuits. I gave them to my child. Even though all the people suffered during the last days of the war, they helped one another. That is the presence of God for me. I really thank God for being with us and continuing to be with us in our struggles [Interview number 6: Tamil Christian].

5.2.6.2. The Views of Buddhist War-Widows on Religion and God/s

1) The Views of Buddhist War-Widows on Religion[51]

Many Buddhist war-widows appreciated the Way of the Buddha: a Way taught by him handed down to them. For example, one Buddhist widow stated clearly, "[T]he path to cessation of suffering which the Buddha showed is common to both man and woman" [Interview number 13: Sinhala Buddhist]. Some of the war-widows appreciated the silent atmosphere in the temple and they liked to listen to *bana* [Buddhist sermons]. Some appreciated freedom in Buddhism, the freedom to follow their religion without many compulsory rules like in Christianity. Some of them spoke about Buddhism as a non-violent way of living. Even though they had positive ideas about the teachings of the Buddha, many of them were disappointed about the way Buddhism was practised, especially in SL. They were also not happy about the position of women in Buddhism.

Buddhist war-widows felt that the non-violent Way of the Buddha was misused by some of the religious and political leaders to achieve their selfish goals. For some, as described in the first chapter, involvement in political matters was not a problem; the problem was misusing Buddhism as a 'political religion'. A Buddhist widow had to say:

> Now see, *'Bodu Bala Sena'* [a political Buddhist movement including many Buddhist monks], is a violent group. They go against the values of Buddhism. It is a shame that our *Mahanayaka* Theras [heads of Buddhist clergy] do not speak against them. All keep silence … why? Is this Buddhism? What do we teach our children? It's very sad … Buddhism is based on love for the whole universe; not only to human beings but also to the whole creation. Today these monks who should teach the values of the Buddha are committing violence. They say that this is a Buddhist country. If so, love, peace, respect, and forgiveness should be everywhere. I am really disappointed to see the situation of our country [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

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51 The word 'religion' is and can be applied to Buddhism, though under the influence of nineteenth century European/British rationalism people began to speak of Buddhism as a philosophy rather than a religion or a 'way of life'. But then no Indian system is a pure philosophy (*darshana.* but also a *pratipada* a way of life. Religion normally is a blanket term for any system that advocates salvific truth (e.g. Four Nobel Truths), which is realised by a path or practice (*aryastangika marga).* Normally a religion has these two ingredients. Since Buddhism has them we can say it is a religion. Thus Aloysius Pieris, interviewed by researcher, 12 December 2014.

Buddhist war-widows claimed that Buddhism should promote love not violence. Hence, some war-widows were highly critical of the prevailing Buddhist political parties where monks were actively involved in refusing to create coexistence in their pluralistic Sri Lankan society, creating instead division among the people.

Even though widows expected guidance from their religious leaders in dealing with their problems as war-widows, they very often did not receive support. The monks encouraged war-widows to behave like traditional Sinhala women, in conformity with all the cultural restrictions. War-widows did not want to be the slaves of their religion; instead they wanted to attain liberation by following in the footsteps of the Buddha. Some war-widows therefore decided to stay away from the unnecessary rituals and practices of religion and to follow the Path of the Buddha on their own.

Buddhist war-widows felt that women were marginalised, isolated and neglected in Buddhism and did not uphold the dignity of women. Some of the women also felt that Buddhism was a cause of oppression of women in society, or were even discouraged because of the Buddha's attitude towards women as had been taught by their teachers.

All of them accepted that no one could change one's own *kamma*[52] of the past life, yet they said that it was not correct to say that all the suffering that they experienced today was due to the bad *kamma* of their past lives. Some mentioned that they could deal differently with present pains and sufferings so that they would be reborn in a good realm in their next birth. They also wondered that if they could not change their *kamma*, as they were taught from their childhood, then how could they change their present lives?

When asked about the teachings of their religion and the impact it had on them, all of them were pleased about the teachings of the Buddha. However, when answering the question, many of them described their religious leaders as follows:

- Some Buddhist religious leaders do not respect women/war-widows.
- They consider women as secondary to men.

52 The literal meaning of *kamma* stands for 'action' or 'doing'; in Buddhism it means only 'volitional action' but not all actions. This term will be elaborated on in the Fourth chapter.

- The religious leaders promote the idea that being born as a woman was a consequence of one's bad actions in a previous life.
- Some of them promoted violence in the country instead of peace.
- They preach one thing while practising another.
- They give priority to rituals, customs and money.
- The way they deal with the rich and powerful is different from how they deal with the powerless, women and the poor.
- They could not be followers of the Buddha just by wearing robes.

The responses given by the Buddhist war-widows regarding their views on religion highlighted some key elements. While appreciating the Path revealed by the Buddha and his teachings, many Buddhist war-widows, like the Christian war-widows, were disappointed about the hierarchical and patriarchal systems of their religion. Some were disappointed with the way political leaders misused Buddhism politically. A religion that ought to promote love, had been misused by some Buddhists, including monks, in order to affirm that the country only belonged to the Sinhala Buddhists.

Like the Christian war-widows, many Buddhist war-widows commented negatively on the relationship of religious leaders with society. They did not expect religious leaders to promote violence in the name of Buddhism. Instead, they expected them to promote love, respect, justice and equality for both men and women without any bias based on religion or ethnicity. Since they worshipped the robe of the monks (Buddhists mainly worship the robe rather than the person), war-widows expected the monks to follow the Way of the Buddha in return for the honour they receive from the people.

2) The Views of Buddhist War-Widows on God/Gods

The following are the ideas of Buddhist war-widows with regard to their belief in God/s.

- One widow was not interested in Gods [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].
- Another widow said that she did not believe in Gods but she accepted that some Buddhists worship Gods [Interview number 13: Sinhala Buddhist]. According to her, people need someone to share their pain and problems with and some need help from Gods. That is why they go to different Gods or Goddesses. She stated clearly that the Buddha is not a God.

- A widow said that since she had not experienced Gods, she did not know how to speak about Gods but that she believed in a universal power that energises the world [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].
- When asked, "what is your view of God/s," one Buddhist said that it was not a good question since Buddhists do not believe in a God like Christians do [Interview number 15: Sinhala Buddhist, who nevertheless had a special place for God/Goddess in her garden].
- Two of them said that they believed in Gods, as there are many Gods and Goddesses [Interview numbers 16 and 17: Sinhala Buddhists]. One of them performed a special devotion to a Goddess [Interview number 16: Sinhala Buddhist]. Another was worshipping the Gods and Goddesses of Hinduism in order to extend her solidarity with them [Interview number 17: Sinhala Buddhist]. Both of these women believed that Gods and Goddesses in this world were protecting them from different kinds of dangers and blessing them so that they would have happy lives. They also had the idea that sometimes Gods punish people for wrongdoing.
- Unlike Christians, no one spoke about God in the singular.

The views of Buddhist war-widows about God/s or Goddess/es were ambiguous. Theravāda Buddhism, which is practised in SL, does not speak about Gods or Goddesses as the ultimate reality but Theravādins speak about the realm of Gods, which is a higher realm than the human one. There were some war-widows who believed in Gods and Goddesses, which suggested that some people like to worship a God or Goddess as in other religions.

In short: some war-widows believed in Gods/Goddesses, some did not. What became clear was that no one spoke about God in the singular. Some of the women who believed in God/s, had been influenced by Hindus.

6. War-Widows' Resistance to the Dominant Structures

Drawing from the responses of both Sinhala and Tamil war-widows, the following is the summary of their resistance to marginalisation:

6.1 Political Resistance

- Building formal and informal networks among war-widows and with other groups: inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-class networks in order to affirm justice, peace and human rights.

- Demanding responsible parties to reveal the truth about the past: specifically about what happened to their husbands/relatives – A political process of accountability that insists on truth and reconciliation.
- Breaking silence to reveal the injustice done to them by the government and armed forces.
- Living their sisterhood without racial, class or religious discrimination.
- Consciousness-raising/conscientisation of war-widows about their rights, dignity and potential through seminars, workshops and training programmes.
- Introducing and creating various means of helping one another to cope with the challenges of life.
- Standing up for their rights as individuals and as a group.
- Showing their anger towards the dominating government that oppresses the rights of Tamils who do have the right to live in peace in their homeland. (Verbal and non-verbal means)
- Tamil war-widows show their strength and courage in overcoming their oppression as women to prove that Tamils are neither a weak nor a defeated nation.
- War-widows taking on new leadership roles at the grassroots level to defend their rights by addressing the discriminatory social structures that demean women/war-widows.
- Showing their resistance towards the oppression of women: seeking dignity of life.
- Resisting the armed forces in terms of militarisation.

6.2 Religious Resistance

- Speaking about God in a new way.
- Becoming aware of marginalisation, isolation and discrimination in their own religion. When they become war-widows the situation deteriorates and if they are Tamils the situation gets even worse.
- Understanding religion in a new way and practising it in accordance with the values they identify as necessary for becoming followers of Jesus and/or the Buddha.
- Emphasising true Christian values by 'living the example' and giving priority to values rather than religious rituals and customs.

- Avoiding priests for blessings even for special events in their lives.
- Being critical of the influence of religion through which culture becomes one of the causes of oppression of war-widows.
- Questioning the validity of the Bible, especially regarding the issues of the oppression of women in family and social life.
- Appreciating freedom of life rather than being controlled by certain rules and customs of their religions.
- Returning to the scriptures for guidance in their lives rather than listening to their religious leaders who marginalise them.
- Refusing to pray in the Church with those who oppress them. Some of them go to Church when nobody is there and pray to God.
- Questioning their religious leaders when they oppress women because of their attitude towards motherhood/womanhood/widowhood.
- Gaining energy by worshipping Goddesses while extending their solidarity to women in other religions.
- Finding their own ways to deal with oppression.
- Using their own religious practices as a means of resisting political oppression.
- Relating their stories/faith journey on the basis of a new understanding or broader perspective.

6.3 Cultural Resistance

- Extending their roles as breadwinners, decision-makers, household managers or leaders of grassroots movements, something which was not normal for them as married women.
- Living alone without the 'protection' of a male. Some have rejected their fathers, brothers or other males as protectors.
- Rethinking remarriage
  - Breaking the norm of Tamil culture, 'one man for life'.
  - Remaining single, not because of a prevailing norm, but to affirm the idea that a woman has the capacity to live without a male partner: Life without a husband is quite possible.
  - They said clearly to their family members or the villagers that to remarry or to be single is their own personal decision and not a public matter. They wish to have the freedom to decide what is good for their own wellbeing.
  - Some of them resisted remarriage to avoid pregnancy.

- Breaking certain rituals, customs and rules regarding war-widows.
- Refusing to identify themselves as a marginalised group of people under the banner of 'war-widows', because even though they had lost their husbands, war-widows still are women. Therefore, they preferred to use the term 'female head of the household' rather than 'widow'.
- Rejecting the idea of the external visibility of a widow and in line with that resistance to visible cultural restrictions on women.
- Attending auspicious events and not following the dress code for war-widows (which concerns especially Tamils).
- Rejecting material help from their families and the families of their husbands in order to be free.
- Questioning parents, who are/were controlling them because of their womanhood or widowhood.
- Questioning myths about widowhood.
- Going out alone at night without a male companion, whenever this was necessary.
- Being able to explain the meaning of their new ways of dealing with their situation to those who challenge them.
- Mixing freely with men in their society.
- Being open to society rather than being confined to the home.
- Taking some practical steps to conscientise other war-widows and people in society to accept women as human beings with dignity.
- Speaking openly about their rights as women and war-widows – fighting for a different vision of the world.
- Giving moral support to the war-widows who resist cultural restrictions in their day-to-day lives.

6.4 Economic Resistance

- Changing roles of women as they take up employment.
- Learning new skills in order to meet the requirements of the job market.
- Taking risks by crossing the boundaries of 'women's work' in order to face economic challenges in their lives.
- Considering equality of both men and women in the workplace.
- Being involved in risky jobs, which men do not want to be involved in.

- Coming together as a group of women to deal with financial difficulties: self-employment and joint earning methods.
- When being discriminated against in the workplaces due to their sex/gender/class, they place the matter before the authorities.
- Handling financial matters not only at home, but also when dealing with different agencies.
- Challenging the government about its negligence of the economic conditions of war-widows (especially Tamil war-widows).

7. Identification of the Research Gap

As Linda de Charon states, "[T]he discussion of previous studies and what has already been accomplished within the field of study should provide a basis for the gap in the literature."[53] The quality of research is based on the way the researcher answers the main questions, in this case the ones mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: (1) What do I want to research?; (2) Why do I want to research it?; and (3) How do I want to research it? Based on these three questions, the present study was carried out in order to investigate Sri Lankan war-widows' new ways of dealing with their oppression and marginalisation in the present post-war context.

Firstly, it had to be highlighted that little research had been done on female-headed households in SL, a phenomenon that is a result of events such as divorce, separation, the natural death of the husband, migration and war – in short: for conflict and non-conflict reasons. A few other research studies focused on women who became 'widows' or 'war-widows' due to the ethno-national war.

Secondly, previous research studies on war-widows in SL focused mainly on the Eastern part of the country, perhaps for some practical reasons. For example, many past research studies had been done during wartime and going to the war zone for such research was unthinkable. There was no possibility to do research in the Vanni area because of the restricted access to this area during the previous regime. Some researchers chose the Eastern part of the country as the field of study in view of an inter-religious and inter-cultural approach. Unlike the situation in other

53 Linda de Charon, "The Literature Review," in *Dissertation and Research Success: Hands-On Coaching for Doctoral Success before, during, and after Your Dissertation,* eds. Robin Buckley, Timothy Delicath (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2013), 68.

parts of the country, Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese live together in the East.

Thirdly, except for a few studies, all the other research studies on war-widows had been carried out during the war period. What has to be underlined is the fact that the role women played in wartime in their families and societies is in stark contrast to the role women play in their families and societies in a post-war situation, especially as widows. In the aftermath of the war, with the GoSL in power as 'victors', the situation of Tamil war-widows as 'losers' seemed more real than ever before, as they have had to face more difficulties than the Sinhalese.

Fourthly, previous research studies focused on widows from religious and non-religious perspectives. The singularity of this study is that no other researchers have attempted a feminist theological study on war-widows in SL up until the present time.

8. The Significance of the Present Research

In the literature review titled "Reviewing previous studies relevant to the present research, (3.2)" it was highlighted that the researchers in their studies focused mainly on the oppression of female heads of households in general, and war-widows in particular. For example:

- Thiruchandran concludes that war-widows had become victims of the socio-economic structures.
- Ruwanpura, being aware of the multiple results of the ethnic conflict, states that in the case of the Sinhala female heads of households the detrimental effect of conflict was indirect and complex.
- Vasudevan identifies the multi-faceted economic, physical and psycho-social vulnerabilities of Tamil war-widows in the post-war North.
- Kottegoda raises the question of the emotional and personal needs of the female heads of households in SL, including the war-widows in order to make the public aware of their situation.

As demonstrated by Thiruchandran and Vasudevan, the war-widows were not just victims of the prevailing structures of society; they were also agents of social transformation. Since the present research study focuses on the role of war-widows in the religious, cultural, economic and political context of post-conflict SL, the findings of past research studies will be utilised to strengthen the solidity of the present work.

With the aim of analysing the situation of war-widows from religious, cultural, economic and political points of view, we concentrated our attention on some of the important issues in the life of war-widows and addressed the following questions: how did the war-widows deal with marginalisation and oppression in society? When widowhood was considered as inauspicious in their society, how did these women deal with it? How did they deal with the change from being a wife to being a war-widow householder? How did they deal with their gender roles, which were determined by religious and cultural systems? Did they want to remain silent about the political systems that repress them? If they stepped out of certain cultural traditions and customs and political restrictions what impelled them to do this? What made them take this leap into the unknown, moving outside the 'box'? Did they have any knowledge of a historical precedence of women breaking the silence? Were there any similarities/ dissimilarities between Buddhist and Christian or Sinhalese and Tamil women in their dealing with marginalisation?

The new findings of the present research will be discussed under three sub-headings, namely; (1) The experience of the oppression and the marginalisation of widowhood; (2) Resistance of war-widows; and (3) War-widows' perception of religion.

1) The Experience of the Oppression and Marginalisation of Widowhood

Firstly, the death of a husband, followed by pain, isolation and desperation, was a common denominator for Tamil and Sinhala war-widows. The reality of being a Tamil war-widow was, however, drastically different from being a Sinhala war-widow. The main reason for the difference has been ascribed to the understanding of being the widow of either a war enemy or the widow of a war hero. Tamil war-widows had to face enormous challenges due to belonging to a minority ethnic community that was considered the 'enemy' of the Sinhalese by the Sinhalese.

Secondly, as an outcome of the above mentioned ethnic conflict and unlike the Sinhala war-widows, Tamils had been marginalised and neglected by the GoSL and furthermore had to live under the control of the military forces while facing deprivation. There is no political solution to the problems of the Tamils, no revelation of the truth about the last stage

of the war, no authentic explanation for the disappearances, land grabbing, militarisation, Sinhalisation, Buddhistisation, and the lack of economic support.

Thirdly, even though there was a stigma attached to being a widow in SL in both the Sinhala and Tamil cultures, the restrictions on war-widows in the Tamil culture seemed to be stronger than in the Sinhala culture. In fact, the Tamil war-widows who were oppressed politically, socially and economically were doubly oppressed even in their own culture because of some harmful cultural taboos, rituals, customs and negative attitudes towards women.

2) Resistance of War-Widows

Having examined the war-widows' new ways of dealing with the existing religious, cultural, economic and political hegemony by challenging the traditional patriarchal or chauvinistic views, it is correct to say, as did Thiruchandran and Vasudevan, that war-widows are not merely victims but also agents of social transformation. Exploring the strategies and new methods used by war-widows who have been empowered by one another within women's associations at grassroots level, it became clear that they collectively resist dominating religious, cultural, economic and political structures in the present Sri Lankan post-war context.

The findings of the present research proved that there were war-widows who refused to be victims of the war. They openly resisted the prevailing dominating religious, cultural, economic and political structures verbally and non-verbally, directly and indirectly, individually and together, locally and internationally. The strength of the war-widows' struggle for emancipation was the involvement of groups of women at grassroots level and at inter-religious, inter-cultural, inter-class and inter-caste levels.

3) The War-Widows' Perception of Religion

The experience of war-widows in the religious, cultural, economic and political context of SL – oppression by the social structures and resistance to those structures – created doubt about the role of religion in the lives of the war-widows. The present research studied the war-widows' views of their religion and God/s in order to examine the role of religion in the experience of oppression by war-widows and their resistance to the

harmful structures in society. It also examined whether or not religion liberates war-widows from oppression or becomes either direct or indirect cause of oppression.

The findings of how the war-widows think about religion and God/s indicated important new ideas and challenged the two main established religions in SL: Buddhism and Christianity. On the one hand, women were marginalised and oppressed by religion because of the patriarchal view of women; on the other hand, women who had remained silent about the negative view of women in religion had come to the realisation that these two established religions were far removed from the teachings of their founders. They realised that religion in general did not liberate them by challenging the damaging situation of war-widows in their culture. As a result, war-widows had come to the conclusion that they did not want to remain victims of religion by blindly following the unnecessary rules and rituals that did not help them to experience God/Liberation. Instead, they became the agents of religion who empower women to live with dignity and respect.

Conclusion

This chapter, based on the findings of the fieldwork, explored the resistance of war-widows to the oppressive political, religious, cultural and economic structures that exist in post-conflict SL.

The results of the fieldwork in this chapter can be considered as an effort to explore a significant yet unknown area of the experiences and the reality of being war-widows. Despite restrictions and shortcomings, the fieldwork was organised in a way that lead to an understanding of five main areas that deeply concern the lives of war-widows: (1) Factors that made women war-widows and their first reaction to being forced into widowhood; (2) Challenges the war-widows faced after the death of their husbands; (3) Obstacles war-widows faced in society; (4) Their participation and involvement in support groups in society; and (5) War-widows' views on religion and God/s. The fieldwork investigated not only the visible status of war-widows in SL in detail, but also the differences between the experiences of a Sinhala war-widow and a Tamil war-widow in the same Sri Lankan society, as well as war-widows' resistance to the prevailing religious, cultural, economic and political hegemonies.

Hence, it was necessary to understand the reasons for the oppression and marginalisation of these women in their own religions and in all the other spheres that are closely connected to their religion. The fieldwork affirmed that religion had an impact – either negative or positive – on the lives of war-widows. Therefore, an essential part of this study was to prove whether there is a link between the teachings of religion and the oppression and marginalisation of war-widows. Is religion a restrictive or a supportive element in the war-widows' daily living activities? It was important to examine what made them resist the existing ideologies, customs and norms of their own religion and culture in SL?

In order to deal with these issues, it will be essential to understand the attitude towards suffering in the two main religions in SL – Buddhism and Christianity – which I selected as the religion of the war-widows for the fieldwork. What is the official teaching of these two religions on suffering, that is, the Christian theological and Buddhist philosophical notion of suffering? How do the Christian theologians and Buddhist thinkers engage the notion of suffering found in these two religions? What is the contribution of the war-widows to the existing notions: did they bring new elements to the notions of suffering in Christian and Buddhist religious thinking? All of these, and a more critical view of Christian feminist theologians and Buddhist feminist thinkers will be discussed in chapters three and four.

Part II

THE SPECTATORS

Chapter Three

THE NOTION OF SUFFERING IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL THINKING

By ritualising the suffering and death of Jesus and by challenging the powerless in society and Church to imitate Jesus' perfect obedience and self-sacrifice, Christian ministry and theology do not interrupt but continue to foster the circle of violence engendered by kyriarchal[1] *social and ecclesial structures, as well as by cultural and political discourses.*[2]

Introduction

The Christian war-widows in their search for liberation, questioned some of the existing teachings, ideas and explanations on suffering in religious thinking, which led to studying how suffering is perceived and interpreted in Christian theological thinking. As discussed in the previous chapter, the responses of the war-widows revealed the influence of their religions in their daily life. Hence, it is important to explore how the teachings on suffering in Christian theological thinking affect the lives of widows in SL: religion as a supportive element to overcome the marginalisation and oppression of widows, or religion as a means that is misused to marginalise widows through oppressive teachings, customs and rules. That is why the aim of the present chapter is, to discuss suffering in Christian theological thinking with the intention of focusing on a theological and contextual exploration of Christian war-widows' resistance to their marginalisation on three main levels.

The first part of the present chapter will discuss suffering from the perspective of institutional classical Christian theological teaching. This

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1 "A neologism coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and derived from the Greek words for 'lord' or 'master' (kyrios) and 'to rule or dominate' (archein) which seeks to redefine the analytic category of patriarchy in terms of multiplicative intersecting structures of domination. *Kyriarchy* is a social-political system of domination in which elite educated propertied men hold power over women and other men. *Kyriarchy* is best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social structures of super ordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression." Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 211.

2 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 151.

section will deal with some of the existing dominant teachings on suffering through examining some of the official documents of the Church.

The second part will explore how this teaching is challenged by two Catholic liberation theologians – Gustavo Gutiérrez and Jon Sobrino – and a Protestant theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, who speak of suffering from the perspective of the poor and suffering in unjust social structures.

The third part will address how three feminist theologians – Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid – write about suffering from the perspective of women, based on critical analysis of their daily experience.

I. Suffering from the Perspective of Institutional Christian Thinking

Introduction

> These [Suffering and death] are a part of human existence, and it is futile, not to say misleading, to try to hide them or ignore them. On the contrary, people must be helped to understand their profound mystery in all their harsh reality. Even pain and suffering have meaning and value when they are experienced in close connection with love received and given.[3]

The main focus of the first part of the present chapter is to discuss suffering from the perspective of institutional Christian theological thinking by paying attention to some of the official teachings of the Church on suffering and other prevalent ideas on suffering in the Church. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), the official teachings of the Catholic Church are based on Sacred Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium of the Church. As mentioned in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum*, Sacred Scripture is "the word of God in as much as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit .... Sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and hands it on to their successors in its full purity so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it, preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known."[4] Sacred Scripture and Tradition are inter-linked. The

3 John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, chapter IV: For a New Culture of Human Life, no. 97 (March 25, 1995).

4 Paul VI, *Dei verbum*, chapter II: Handing on Divine Revelation, no. 9 (Second Vatican Council, November 18, 1965).

Magisterium of the Church is the living teaching office of the Church: "the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome."[5] As stated during Vatican II:

> The task of authoritatively interpreting the Word of God, whether written or handed on [Scripture or Tradition], has been entrusted exclusively to the living Magisterium of the Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.[6]

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) employed the term *magisteria* in the plural, that is, bishops have a 'pastoral magisterium' (*magisterium cathedrae pastoralis*), whereas the theologians have a 'magisterial magisterium' (*magisterium cathedrae magistralis*). Aquinas suggests two kinds of teaching roles: preaching that is attributed to the pastoral magisterium and doctrinal teaching attributed to magisterial magisterium.[7]

Along with the Church's official teachings on suffering and some of the prevalent ideas on suffering in the institutional Church, the perspectives of some theologians/writers in the Christian Church will now be discussed.

1. The Origin of Suffering

Many Christians who believe in the 'almighty' and 'all powerful' God ask the question: why is suffering in the world if God is good and powerful? This questions the very existence of God. Those who believe in the existence of God question the nature of God – If God exists, is God powerful or powerless? Is God merciful or cruel? Does God cause human suffering as a punishment for sins? Where is God in our suffering? Why is God silent in our suffering? Does God participate actively or passively in our suffering? According to the CCC:

> God is infinitely good and all his (*sic*) works are good. Yet no one can escape the experience of suffering or the evils in nature, which seem to be linked to the limitations proper to creatures.[8]

To the question why evil does exist in this world created by God, the CCC claims that there is no quick answer, yet "[O]nly Christian faith

5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 1, part 1, chapter 2, article 2, no. 85.

6 Paul VI, *Dei verbum*, chapter II: Handing on Divine Revelation, no. 10.

7 Cf. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Task and Methods," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 26.

8 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part 1, section 2, chapter 1, article 1, no. 385.

as a whole constitutes the answer to this question."[9] However, "[O]ur experiences of evil and suffering, injustice, and death, seem to contradict the Good News: they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it."[10] John Paul II claims, "[A]t different moments in life, it [suffering] takes place in different ways, it assumes different dimensions; nevertheless, in whatever form, suffering seems to be, and is, almost inseparable from man's (*sic*) earthly existence."[11] The lack of a sufficient human answer to the question of evil and suffering is reflected in the book of Augustine of Hippo (354-430), *Confessions*: "I sought whence evil comes, and there was no solution."[12]

John Paul II in his apostolic letter, *Salvifici doloris*, defines suffering as the experience of evil. In his view, evil is:

> [A] certain lack, limitation, or distortion of good. We could say that man (*sic*) suffers because of a good in which he (*sic*) does not share, from which in a certain sense he (*sic*) is cut off, or of which he (*sic*) has deprived himself (*sic*) .... Thus, in the Christian view, the reality of suffering is explained through evil, which always, in some way, refers to a good.[13]

This understanding of evil as the cause of suffering suggests that suffering and evil should be defined alongside each other. John Paul II identifies suffering as having either a passive or active relation to evil.[14]

The official teachings of the Church claim that after the first sin of the first parents, the world is virtually inundated by sin. The CCC states: "Adam and Eve transmitted to their descendants human nature wounded by their own first sin and hence deprived of original holiness and justice; this deprivation is called 'original sin'."[15] Furthermore, the teaching of the Church proclaims the consequences of original sin in the following manner: "as a result of original sin, human nature is weakened in its power, subject to ignorance, suffering and the domination of death, and inclined to sin."[16] The official teaching of the Church is that the origin

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9 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part 1, section 2, chapter 1, article1, no. 309.

10 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part 1, section 1, chapter 3, article1, no. 164.

11 John Paul II, Introduction to *Salvifici doloris*, no.3 (February 11, 1984).

12 Augustine, *Confessions*, 7, 7, 11.

13 John Paul II*, Salvifici doloris,* chapter II: The World of Human Suffering*,* no. 7.

14 Cf. John Paul II*, Salvifici doloris,* chapter II: The World of Human Suffering*,* no. 7.

15 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part 1, section 2, chapter 1, article1, no. 417.

16 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part 1, section 2, chapter 1, article1, no. 418.

of suffering has its roots in the fall of the first parents, as described in the book of Genesis. The Church Fathers, for example Augustine, Tertullian and Thomas Aquinas in their interpretation of the 'Fall' in the Genesis story, had the notion that sin entered human history through the weakness of the woman – Eve. Therefore, they condemn women as the cause of evil and death, leading to 'women' being considered subordinate or secondary to men. They also considered women to be the temptresses of men. For example, one of the Latin Church Fathers, Tertullian (c. 155 – c. 240) says:

> (Every woman should be ...) walking about as Eve mourning and repentant, in order that by every garb of penitence she might the more fully expiate that which she derives from Eve, the ignominy, I mean, of the first sin, and the odium (attaching to her as the cause) of human perdition.[17]

The profound impact of this teaching is reflected in the negative attitudes Christians have had towards women, and this perception of women negatively affects the lives of women in their families, religion and society.

2. The "Why" of Suffering

Pope John Paul II expands his understanding of the meaning of suffering as follows:

> This is the meaning of suffering, which is truly supernatural and at the same time human. It is *supernatural* because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply human, because in it the person discovers himself (*sic*), his (*sic*) own humanity, his (*sic*) own dignity, his (*sic*) own mission.[18]

He also claims that as the meaning of life is found in giving and receiving love, the same love gives meaning to suffering and death.

Justifying the existence of suffering, John Paul II instructs: "[L]ove is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery: we are conscious of the insufficiency and inadequacy of our explanations. Christ causes us to enter into the mystery and to discover the 'why' of suffering, as far as we are capable of grasping the sublimity of

17 Tertullian, quoted by John Wijngaards, "Women were Considered to be in a State of Punishment for Sin": http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/sinful.asp (accessed 12 July 2015).

18 John Paul II, Conclusion to *Salvifici doloris*, no. 31.

divine love."[19] Highlighting the words in John 3:16 – "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life", John Paul II continues to impart that, "… God gives his (*sic*) Son to 'the world' to free man (*sic*) from evil, which bears within itself the definitive and absolute perspective on suffering."[20]

In the view of John Paul II, suffering is a punishment for sin when it is connected to one's fault. In his words: "punishment has a meaning not only because it serves to repay the objective evil of the transgression with another evil, but first and foremost because it creates the possibility of rebuilding goodness in the subject who suffers."[21] He affirms, "[W]hile it is true that suffering has a meaning as punishment, when it is connected with a fault, it is not true that all suffering is a consequence of a fault and has the nature of a punishment. Suffering has the nature of a test."[22] Pope John Paul II claims that in love, the Christians who suffer, find salvific meaning of their sorrow as Jesus has taken upon himself all the suffering of the people of all times. Love is a main source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering as per the official teachings of the Church. Pope John Paul II notes:

> ... there should come together in spirit beneath the Cross on Calvary all suffering people who believe in Christ, and particularly those who suffer because of their faith in him who is the Crucified and Risen One, so that the offering of their sufferings may hasten the fulfilment of the prayer of the Saviour himself that all may be one. Let there also gather beneath the Cross all people of goodwill, for on this Cross is the 'Redeemer of man (*sic*)', the Man of Sorrows, who has taken upon himself the physical and moral sufferings of the people of all times, so that in love they may find the salvific meaning of their sorrow and valid answers to all of their questions.[23]

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19 John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, part III: The Quest for an answer to the Question of the Meaning of Suffering, no. 13.

20 John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, part III: The Quest for an answer to the Question of the Meaning of Suffering, no. 13.

21 John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, part III: The Quest for an answer to the Question of the Meaning of Suffering, no. 12.

22 John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, part III: The Quest for an answer to the Question of the Meaning of Suffering, no. 11.

23 John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, part III: The Quest for an answer to the Question of the Meaning of Suffering, no. 31.

3. Jesus as the Saviour in the Plan of God

The official teaching of the Church is, that with the fall of man and woman, the bond between God and human beings was destroyed, but Jesus restored this relationship through his death on the cross. The Church accepts Jesus Christ as the Saviour, and this doctrine considers (1) Jesus to be truly God and truly man; (2) The two natures of Jesus as united in the one person of the Son of God; (3) Jesus to bring the fullness of God's revelation; (4) Jesus to have saved everyone through the sacrifice of his cross; and (5) The paschal mystery of Jesus as the supreme revelation of God's love.[24]

The CCC claims that Jesus has fulfilled what God asked him to do from the moment of his incarnation, and the Church understands the suffering and death of Jesus in relation to the will of God. The Church proclaims that the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the whole world [Jn 2:2] expresses his loving communion with the Father (*sic*).[25] Hence, the Church teaches that "Jesus' violent death was not the result of chance in an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, but is part of the mystery of God's plan …."[26] The Church also claims that Jesus died for the sins of all people in accordance with the Scriptures, and that his life was an offering to God.

The CCC further teaches that the love of God is the centre of the plan of salvation, therefore by sending His (*sic*) only son, God expressed His (*sic*) unconditional love towards sinful humanity. "By giving up His (*sic*) own Son for our sins, God manifests that His (*sic*) plan for us is one of benevolent love, prior to any merit on our part …."[27] In this regard the Church claims that for the sake of all humanity God made Jesus suffer and die and, by doing so, God took the initiative of 'universal redeeming love'.[28]

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24 Cf. Jacques Dupuis and Josef Neuner, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 6th edition (Bangalore: Theological Publication in India, 1996), 193.

25 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part I, section 2, chapter 2, article 4, no. 606.

26 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part I, section 2, chapter 2, article 4, no. 599.

27 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part I, section 2, chapter 2, article 4, no. 604.

28 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part I, section 2, chapter 2, article 4, no. 604.

In the view of Thomas Aquinas, the salvific plan of God motivates us to love God, it directs us how to love, it merits a great reward, it moves us to a debt of holiness and finally it rebounds to humanity's greater dignity.[29] Both Thomas Aquinas and Augustine had the idea that Jesus was not forced to die by a 'cruel God'. The Son offered himself freely into the hands of the Father (*sic*) , as it was the way chosen by the Father (*sic*) in His (*sic*) wisdom to make our salvation possible.

Redemptive Suffering

The CCC states that the suffering and death of Jesus is God's plan for the salvation of His (*sic*) creation: "Christ's death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men (*sic*) ..."[30]

First, it is a gift from God the Father himself (*sic*), for the Father (*sic*) handed his (*sic*) Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself (*sic*). At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father (*sic*) through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience.[31]

John Paul II emphasises that Jesus "conquers sin by His obedience unto death, and He overcomes death by His Resurrection."[32] He says that Jesus accomplished the salvation of humankind from sin and death by suffering and death on the cross which "in the plan of eternal love, has a redemptive character."[33]

Based on the doctrine of divine impassibility, the Church speaks of the suffering of Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, in relation to his human nature but not in relation to his divine nature. Even though traditional Christian teaching accepts that Jesus was God incarnate, it does not follow the idea that God suffered in Jesus on the cross. The understanding of the Church is that Jesus' death is both the paschal sacrifice and the sacrifice of the New Covenant and therefore, is a unique sacrifice.

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29 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* part III, question 46, article 2.

30 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part I, section 2, chapter 2, article 4, no. 613.

31 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part I, section 2, chapter 2, article 4, no. 614.

32 John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, part IV: Jesus Christ Suffering Conquered by Love, no. 14.

33 John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, part IV: Jesus Christ Suffering Conquered by Love, no. 16.

> Christ's death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men (*sic*), through 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world [Jn 1:29; cf. 8:34-36; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19.], and the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which restores man (*sic*) to communion with God by reconciling him (*sic*) to God through the blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins [Mt 26:28; cf. Ex 24:8; Lev 16:15-16; 1 Cor 11:25.].' This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices [Cf. Heb 10:10.]. First, it is a gift from God the Father himself (*sic*), for the Father (*sic*) handed his (*sic*) Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself (*sic*). At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father (*sic*) through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience.[34]

The Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all men (*sic*) without exception: "[T]here is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer [Council of Quiercy (853): DS 624; cf. 2 Cor 5:15; 1 Jn 2:2.]."[35] The Church teaches that God's saving plan was accomplished by the redemptive death of Jesus Christ. The Church, in later times, taught that forgiveness and salvation were to be obtained through the death of Jesus.

The discussion on suffering by John Paul II was a reflection of the traditional views of the Church on the suffering and death of Jesus and how it affects the Church's present teachings on suffering. With this in mind, the next section will discuss the three well-known traditional views of atonement: the 'Ransom' theory [The *Christus Victor* tradition], the 'Satisfaction' theory, and the 'Moral Influence' theory, in order to examine how some of the Church Fathers interpret the death of Jesus as an absolute necessity for human salvation.

4. The Doctrine of Atonement

4.1 The *Christus Victor* Tradition: A Ransom Paid to the Devil

The *Christus Victor* or Christ the Victor was one of the atonement theories put forward by many patristic authors from St. Augustine to

34 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part I, section 2, chapter 2, article 4, no. 613-14.

35 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part I, section 2, chapter 2, article 4, no. 605.

St. Athanasius. It focused on Christ's victory over the devil and death. Victory was obtained through a ransom paid to the devil. Therefore, this "… atonement image used the image of a cosmic battle between good and evil, between the forces of God and those of Satan."[36] This theory explains how Jesus came to this world as a sinless man and defeated the devil and death. The theory further denotes that the devil had been given dominion over humanity when people were alienated from God. Jesus, through the power of his resurrection, foiled the devil's plan to have authority over people. The most important aspect of the theory is: Jesus' victory over the devil and death allows all of humanity to be victorious over the devil and death as well.

4. 2 Theory of Satisfaction: A Ransom Paid to God

The theory of satisfaction was fully developed by Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh century in his work *Why Did God Become Man? (Cur Deus Homo?).* Anselm totally rejected the idea of a ransom paid to the devil. For Anselm, the sin of humankind had offended the honour of God and had brought disharmony and injustice into the universe. A debt payment was necessary in order to restore God's honour, which had been offended by the sin of humankind. Anselm claimed that humankind could not pay this debt, therefore, Jesus paid it on behalf of all humanity. Anselm's main assumption was that the required satisfaction for transgression must be made by man (*sic*), and the argument proceeds as follows:

> Men (*sic*) are not able to make the necessary satisfaction, because they are all sinful. If men (*sic*) cannot do it, then God must do it. But, on the other hand, he considers that satisfaction must be made by man (*sic*), because man (*sic*) is guilty. The only solution is that God would become man. This is the answer to the question *Cur Deus homo*?[37]

For Anselm atonement was God's work and God sent his (*sic*) Son in order to make satisfaction to God but not to the devil. Anselm understood the death of Jesus as the satisfaction of God's justice in the universe.

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36 J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), 15.

37 Aulén Gustaf, *Christus Victor*: *An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 86.

4.3 The Theory of Moral Influence: Christ as the Example

The theory of moral influence, which is also called the moral exemplar theory, was universally taught by Church Fathers in the second and third centuries CE. It is usually attributed to Pierre Abélard, Anselm's younger contemporary and is supported by many theologians such as Immanuel Kant, Hastings Rashdall and Paul Tillich. Abélard in his book called *Expositio in Epistolam Ad Romanos (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans)* explained his theory of atonement. Like Anselm, Abélard rejected the idea of Jesus' death as a ransom paid to the devil. He also rejected Anselm's other idea, that is, the death of Jesus as a ransom paid to God's honour. For Abélard, the problem of atonement was not how to change an offended God's mind toward sinners, but "how to bring sinful humankind to see that the God they perceived as harsh and judgmental was actually loving."[38] Abélard emphasises that "Christ is the greatest teacher and example who arouses responsive love in men (*sic*); this love is the basis on which reconciliation and forgiveness rest."[39] This theory explains how Jesus helped all humanity to obtain salvation by giving a perfect moral example through his teachings and his example, emphasising the meaning of suffering and death of Jesus.

While all these atonement theories speak about how Jesus' death saves – the saving power of Christ – they differ significantly from each other. The doctrine of atonement theories, articulate that the reconciliation between God and people occurred through the death and resurrection of Jesus. These atonement theories try to explain the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and by doing so they make the believer aware of the saving power of Christ.

5. The Participation of Christians in Jesus' Suffering

In baptism the Christian has been sacramentally conformed to the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and dedicated to God as a member of the Church.[40]

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38 J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 18.

39 Aulén Gustaf, *Christus Victor*, 96.

40 Cf. Jacques Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 781.

The teachings of the Church proclaim that those who suffer have the possibility of sharing in the redemptive work of Christ, and as the suffering of Jesus led to his glory, so does the suffering of Christians. Being redeemed, human beings are also called to become sharers in Christ's redemptive suffering.[41] The CCC claims that Jesus who suffered for all humanity has left an example so that his followers should follow in his steps. In the view of the Church, suffering pertains to the essence of the life of the followers of Jesus (Mt 5:10-13). Pope Paul VI in his Decree, *Ad gente*s states that "... the Church, prompted by the Holy Spirit, must walk in the same path on which Christ walked: a path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice to the death, from which He came forth a victor by His resurrection."[42]

As stated in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, the suffering of Christians is twofold: (1) suffering for oneself: and (2) suffering for the benefit of others, that is, the whole Mystical Body; It further claims that as Jesus says, the one who wants to follow him must be ready to take up the cross. Therefore, like Jesus, his disciples have to deny themselves for the reign of God (Mt 16:24; Mk 8:34-35; Lk 9:23), and be ready to be persecuted and even put to death (Mt 10:24; Jn. 15:19-21). They must also learn to suffer unjustly with joy for the sake of Christ (1 Pt 4:15-19; JM 1:2; 1 Pet 4:13; 2 Cor 4:9-11; Phil 1:29). The apostles after the resurrection of Jesus rejoiced that they were suffering in the name of Christ (Acts 5:41; 2 Tim 1:8; 12; 2:9, 12). As it is written in the epistles of Paul, there was another reason for his suffering: suffering for the whole Mystical Body. It gave consolation to others (2 Cor 1:4-7), and effected their salvation (2 Tim 2:10).[43]

The official teachings of the Church claim that all Christians have been baptised into Christ, into his death and resurrection through the Sacrament of Baptism (Rom. 6:3-5). From this point of view, all are partakers in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, and accordingly, there is no discipleship of Christ apart from suffering. "Christians endure suffering and even undertake voluntary austerities because the bridegroom has been

41 Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, part V: Sharers in the Suffering of Christ, no. 19.

42 Paul VI, *Ad gentes: On the Mission Activity of the Church*, Chapter 1: Principles of Doctrine, no. 5 (December 7, 1965).

43 Cf. P. Riga/Eds, "Suffering" in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 2003 edition.

taken away. They long for the day when they will see Him as He is; the messianic banquet of Christ is not theirs yet, and they must wait in patience and love …."[44] In the Christian tradition, voluntary submission and works of self-denial are considered as means of imitating Christ's own sacrificial love towards others. John Paul II says:

> The Redeemer suffered in place of man (*sic*) and for man (*sic*). Every man (*sic*) has his (*sic*) own share in the Redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished. He (*sic*) is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption. Thus each man (*sic*), in his (*sic*) suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.[45]

It is understood that just as Jesus suffered and died for others in God's plan of salvation, the followers of Christ too are invited to be willing to suffer for the wellbeing of others. John Paul II says, "[S]uffering as it were contains a special *call to virtue* which man (*sic*) must exercise on his (*sic*) own part. And this is the virtue of perseverance in bearing whatever disturbs and causes harm".[46] While turning to Jesus, the model of the Christian life, believers try to look at their own suffering in the light of Jesus's suffering.

The Anchor Bible Dictionary, states that the early Christian writers focused on two aspects of suffering. Firstly, Christians should be assured that no matter how severely they are treated in this life, the promise of resurrection is there for them, and justice will finally be done (I Cor 15; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Rev 20:11-15; Rev 2:14). Secondly, the assurance that God can bring good even out of suffering, makes it possible to rejoice even in suffering (Rom 5:3-5).[47] The Church reminds Christians that they have to tolerate all kinds of suffering in this world, the suffering of the present world will not last forever and one day they will receive their reward from God.

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44 P. Riga/Eds, "Suffering" in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia,* 2003 edition.

45 John Paul II*, Salvifici doloris,* part V*:* Sharers in the Suffering of Christ, no. 19.

46 John Paul II*, Salvifici doloris,* part V: Sharers in the Suffering of Christ, *no.* 23.

47 Cf. Daniel J. Simundson, "Suffering" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1992 edition.

Final Reflection

In the present chapter attention has been paid to some of the classical Christian theological teachings as well as to more modern perspectives regarding the concept of suffering.

The first part revealed three main elements of the official teachings of the Church on suffering. Firstly, in the view of the official Church, the origin of suffering has its roots in the fall of the first parents, especially the fall of woman, due to which women are condemned as the cause of evil. Secondly, suffering is understood in relation to the suffering and the death of Jesus, the saviour who redeemed the world through his blood, as was the plan of God. Thirdly, following the example of Jesus, who 'sacrificed' his life to save humanity, the followers of Christ are encouraged to embrace suffering as a meaningful way of participating in the suffering of Jesus.

The notion that suffering is redemptive – as is understood and taught by the Church – has been criticised, and suffering that is perpetrated unjustly by oppressors is questioned. If God is loving, then why does God allow suffering in the world? Is it correct to justify suffering that exists in society? Is it morally right to console a sufferer saying it will bring heavenly rewards? Can we equate people's suffering with the virtues of sacrificial love and obedience? Is it correct to say that there is no salvation without suffering? Was it the only way or was there a way for Jesus to save people other than 'sacrificing himself on the cross'? Did God want Jesus to suffer a violent death in order to save humanity? Keeping these critical questions in mind, the next effort is to critically analyse the official teachings of the Church on suffering from the perspective of two Catholic liberation theologians, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino, and a Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann.

II. A Critical Analysis of Suffering from the Perspective of Two Catholic Liberation Theologians and a Protestant Theologian

Introduction

The relation between theory and praxis is a crucial point in the method of liberation theology. In the view of liberation theologians, praxis is not only the starting-point – the locus of theology – but it is also the aim of liberation theology. Liberation theology can be considered to be a fundamental shift in the history and methodology of theology. The praxis

that many liberation theologians speak about, is the suffering of the poor who struggle for their liberation on a structural level.

In the search for a deeper understanding of suffering in Christian thinking, the present part of the chapter presents reflections from the perspectives of the two liberation theologians Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino and a Protestant theologian, Jürgen Moltmann. The understanding of suffering from the perspective of each of these theologians will be presented, together with their life and theological backgrounds, as this might help to understand the development of their theology.

1. The Power of Non-Persons: Gustavo Gutiérrez

1.1 A Biographical Sketch of Gustavo Gutiérrez

Gustavo Gutiérrez who was born in 1928 in Lima, is a Dominican priest, a Peruvian theologian, activist and writer. Gutiérrez is a Mestizo, partly Hispanic and partly Quechuan Indian. He is one of the major theologians recognised as having founded Liberation Theology. Born into a poor family in Lima and suffering from osteomyelitis, a chronic bone infection from the age of twelve to eighteen, he knows what physical pain is. James B. Nickoloff writes: "perhaps the most important legacy of his childhood was an exceptional sensitivity to the physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering of others."[48]

Gutiérrez studied medicine with the desire of becoming a psychiatrist and then changed his mind because he wanted to become a priest. He studied psychology and philosophy at the university of Leuven in Belgium (1951-1955) and earned his master's degree from the university of Lyon in France. Finally, he did theology at the Gregorian university in Rome, Italy, and he was able to study, among others, the work of Karl Marx, which greatly influenced his theology.

When Gutiérrez returned to Peru, he worked as a parish priest and taught at the Catholic university of Lima. Instead of living in Lima's pleasant university area, he chose to live in the slums. While spending much of his life among the poor in Lima, he became a part of their struggle for liberation. He later on speaks about the influence of his mother on him

48 James B. Nickoloff ed. *Gustavo Gutiérrez: Essential Writings* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996; reprint, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 2.

for the love of the poor: "I think her [Gutiérrez's mother] simple faith made me understand something that I later worked out theologically."[49] Gutiérrez contrasted Western classical theology with the reality of the suffering poor people in Peru.[50] Insisting on the primacy of experience, Gutiérrez states:

> Personally, the meaning of my life is not liberation theology, it is to be close to my people, to participate in their struggle for liberation and for a just world, and to share their faith and hope.[51]

During this time, some radical changes took place both in the Church and in Latin America, which led Gutiérrez to see the situation in a new way. These two factors led him to deepen his reflection on theology from which he emerged a liberation theologian with the ability to critique reality. As he states, "… all liberation theology originates among the world's **anonymous**, whoever may write the books or the declarations articulating it." [emphasis is mine].[52] He thus emphasises the experience of the poor, or in his words, 'the world's anonymous' as a source in his new way of doing theology.

As a liberation theologian who emerged from the struggle of the poor in Latin America, Gutiérrez, through his writings, brings to the surface the plight of the poor who are struggling for their liberation. Gutiérrez's original work *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (1971), which was the outcome of his awareness of reality, opened a new era for the whole world to critically reflect on existing theologies. He states in the introduction of this book: "[T]his book is an attempt at reflection, based on the Gospel and the experiences of men and women committed

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49 Gustavo Gutiérrez, quoted by James B. Nickoloff, *Gustavo Gutiérrez*, 11.

50 Christian D. von Dehsen ed*., Lives and Legacies: An Encyclopedia of People Who Changed the World: Philosophers and Religious Leaders* (Phoenix: Oryx Press: 1999), 79.

51 Gustavo Gutiérrez, quoted by Alexander Nava, *The Mystical and Prophetic Thought of Simon Weil and Gustavo Gutiérrez* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 12.

52 Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Two Theological Perspectives: Liberation Theology and Progressive Theology," in *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside of History*, eds. Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 250.

to the process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America."[53]

In the view of Gutiérrez, the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador had a great impact on people. He states: "I think that his martyrdom – because his death can be called that in a broad sense – has greatly enriched the Latin American Church overall … I see Romero's death as illuminating other instances, deaths of lay people, of nuns and of priests, that have occurred recently in Latin America. It gives them value. It makes plain their meaning."[54]

The biographical sketch of Gutiérrez shows that personal experience and pastoral commitment are two important elements in understanding the theology of Gutiérrez.

1.2 Basic Characteristics of Gustavo Gutiérrez's Theological Method

Gutiérrez identifies theology as a 'critical reflection on historical praxis', an epistemological framework for understanding the real situation of the world.[55] Since the Age of Enlightenment, the challenges raised by the spirit of modernism demanded purification and renewal. In dealing with the concrete reality of Latin America, Gutiérrez claims that the challenge comes not from the **'non-believers'** but from **'non-persons'** – people who are not recognised as people by the prevailing social order. They are the poor, the exploited and the marginalised in oppressive and unjust social structures. Gutiérrez considers that "the question we face is not so much how to talk of God in a world come of age, but how to proclaim God as Father (*sic*) in an inhuman world? How do we tell the 'non-persons' that they are the sons and daughters of God?"[56] In this way of looking at reality, 'poverty [is] without doubt' the most important challenge.[57]

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53 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Cardidad Inda and John Eagleson (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), ix.

54 Gustavo Gutiérrez quoted by Robert McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1990), 40.

55 Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* 6.

56 Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," trans. Judith Condor, in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 28.

57 Cf. Ibid., 28.

For Gutiérrez, the first step is praxis in order to deal with the basic question of 'non-persons' in Latin America. He defines praxis as 'transforming action', rather than as a historical transformation. Historical praxis means a transforming change, a transforming action of history.[58] For Gutiérrez, in line with liberation theology, the first step is to contemplate God and put God's will into practice among the poor. Theology is the second step. This way of doing theology reverses the traditional way. Gutiérrez asserts that "the mystery is revealed through contemplation and solidarity with the poor; it is what we call the first act, Christian life, practice. Only thereafter can this life inspire reasoning: that is the second act."[59] What he wanted to do, was offering understanding of the relationship between a life of faith and the transformation of an unjust society into a human and just society. For Gutiérrez, liberation theology is a reflection on practice in the light of faith. The life of faith is not only the starting point; it is also the goal of theological reflection. "To believe (life) and to understand (reflection) are therefore always part of a circular relationship."[60] For Gutiérrez, the life of faith is not only a question of theological methodology but rather implies a lifestyle, a way of being and becoming a disciple of Jesus.

1.3 The Theological Conceptualisation of Gustavo Gutiérrez

The majority of Latin Americans are poor, Gutiérrez therefore does not want to limit his theology to the focus on another world as traditional Christianity does but he turns his attention rather to socio-political liberation in the reality of the present world: reflection on the praxis. Gutiérrez's critical reflection on praxis is a protest against the disregard for human dignity and the crushing conditions that prevent the realisation of a more just society.[61]

Gutiérrez realises that the situation of Latin America requires theology from the perspective of the Latin Americans, as theology must be specific to the context from which it emerges. He recognises the need to be open to a theology that changes over time and in accordance with the social context. Gutiérrez realised that the prevailing theology was based on a European

58 Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Statement by Gustavo Gutiérrez," in *Theology in the Americas*, ed. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 310.

59 Ibid., 29.

60 Ibid., 29.

61 Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15.

context, unrelated to the authentic reality of the poor in Latin America.[62] He designs a new spirituality based on a theological and practical reorientation and argues: "[I]t is in reference to this praxis that an understanding of spiritual growth based on Scripture should be developed, and it is through the same praxis that faith encounters the problems posed by human reason."[63]

Gutiérrez challenges many traditional notions surrounding the relationship between Church and society, Church and politics and the Church and revolutionary movements.

1.4 Gustavo Gutiérrez's Understanding of Suffering

First and foremost, it is important to point out that in Gutiérrez's liberation theological writings, the term 'suffering' is not a central term as his passionate attention is focused on what it means to be poor. He recalls: "… the attempt of some, on the eve of the Bishops' Conference at Puebla – and at Santo Domingo – to tone down the concern about the situation of poverty and to shift the focus of attention to other matters were in vain."[64] For Gutiérrez, speaking about any other matter while neglecting the reality of poverty does not have any meaning, because for him poverty is an expression of sin and a negation of love.

Gutiérrez connects the term 'suffering' with the reality of the poor in his writings, especially the suffering of the poor and the marginalised. The reality of poverty is not an isolated element in society; it is connected to the understanding of the concepts of sin, salvation and liberation. Gutiérrez's understanding of suffering is a broader issue that needs to be studied in conjunction with key themes such as poverty, sin, salvation and liberation.

1.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

1.4.1.1 Theological Reflection on Suffering within the Context of Poverty

Gutiérrez's theology is grounded in the reality of poverty, which continues to be a greater challenge to Christian witness than other elements in life, especially in his own continent of South America. He recognises the poor as the ones who have been 'absent' for so long from both society

62 Cf. Ibid., 16.

63 Ibid., 14.

64 Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," 20.

and Church. Defining the term 'absent', Gutiérrez says: "it is not a matter of physical absence: we are talking of those who have had scant or no significance, and who therefore have not felt (and in many cases still do not feel) in a position to make plain their suffering, their aspirations and their hopes."[65] Gutiérrez is concerned with three types of poverty in his theological method: real/material poverty, spiritual poverty and poverty as a commitment of solidarity and protest.[66]

1) Real /Material Poverty

In speaking of real poverty, which is frequently called material poverty, Gutiérrez agrees with the notion that it is the lack of economic goods necessary for a human person to live a decent life. This category of poverty is a 'subhuman situation': "... to be poor means to die of hunger, to be illiterate, to be exploited by others, not to know that you are being exploited, not to know that you are a person."[67] Being rooted in the Biblical understanding of material poverty, Gutiérrez asserts that material poverty, which is the result of injustice and exploitation, is something to be rejected. He challenges the tendency of Christianity to place a positive value on material poverty – considering poverty as a human and religious ideal. He also challenges the Christian understanding of connecting poverty with fatalism and of seeing the poor as an object of our mercy.[68]

Gutiérrez gives three principal reasons why material poverty is to be rejected: (1) Poverty contradicts the very meaning of the Mosaic religion – the mission entrusted to Moses by God was to lead the people out of slavery, exploitation and alienation; (2) Poverty goes against the mandate of Genesis – human beings are created in the image of God and are destined to take charge of creation; and (3) Human beings are the sacrament of God. Therefore, oppressing human beings means insulting God.[69] Gutiérrez claims "the existence of poverty represents a sundering both of solidarity among men (*sic*) and also of communion with God. Poverty is an expression of sin, that is, of a negation of love."[70]

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65 Ibid., 20.

66 Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* 289.

67 Ibid., 289.

68 Cf. Ibid., 289.

69 Cf. Ibid., 294-295.

70 Ibid., 295.

2) Spiritual Poverty

Gutiérrez's understanding of spiritual poverty goes beyond the ordinary understanding of seeing spiritual poverty as an interior attitude of detachment from goods. Spiritual poverty is "… total availability to the Lord. Its relationship to the use or ownership of economic goods is inescapable, but secondary and partial."[71] Being aware of different aspects of spiritualising poverty, he strongly claims that poverty itself is incompatible with the kingdom (*sic*) of God. The poor are blessed because "… the coming of the kingdom (*sic*) will put an end to their poverty by creating a world of brotherhood (*sic*)."[72]

3) Poverty as a Commitment of Solidarity and Protest

Having clarified material poverty as a scandalous condition and spiritual poverty as an attitude of openness to the Lord, Gutiérrez imparts a third meaning to suffering: "poverty as a commitment of solidarity and protest."[73] Based on the Scriptures and the mission of Jesus on earth, Gutiérrez identifies Christian poverty as an act of love and liberation, which has a redemptive value.

> Christian poverty has meaning only as a commitment of solidarity with the poor, with those who suffer misery and injustice. The commitment is to stand against the violation, which has resulted from sin and is a breach of communion. It is not a question of idealising poverty, but rather of taking it on as it is – an evil – to protest against it and to struggle to abolish it.[74]

Gutiérrez describes new ways of living poverty – poverty as a commitment to solidarity and protest – different from the traditional notion of the "renunciation of the goods of this world."[75] For Gutiérrez, "only authentic solidarity with the poor and a real protest against the poverty of our time can provide the concrete, vital context necessary for a theological discussion of poverty."[76]

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71 Ibid., 299.
72 Ibid., 298.
73 Ibid., 299.
74 Ibid., 300.
75 Ibid., 301.
76 Ibid., 302.

1.4.1.2 A Theological Reflection on the Poor/Non-Persons

As indicated earlier, unlike many Western theologians, Gutiérrez does not attempt to answer the questions of non-believers. His focus is on the non-persons. Regarding the term 'non-persons' he explains: "[T]his does not mean that they truly are 'non-persons', but only that they are treated as such by those with power in society and consequently are more and more prone to regard themselves as non-persons."[77] They are the ones absent from history. Their absence from history leads them to question the socio-economic structures that marginalise them, but not their fundamental religious or philosophical presuppositions.

In Gutiérrez's view, the poor person today is the one who is marginalised by society, a member of the proletariat struggling for his/her most basic rights. He/she is the product of a social structure: "poverty does not come about by accident, through fate or by God's will; it is the result of the evil actions of people in society."[78] He firmly states that to be in solidarity with the poor means to be against an oppressive system. Solidarity means fighting for the liberation of the poor:

> I am firmly convinced that poverty—this sub-human condition in which the majority of humanity lives today—is more than a social issue. Poverty poses a major challenge to every Christian conscience and therefore to theology as well. Our context today is characterised by a glaring disparity between the rich and the poor. No serious Christian can quietly ignore this situation. It is no longer possible for someone to say, "Well, I didn't know" about the suffering of the poor. Poverty has a visibility today that it did not have in the past. The faces of the poor must now be confronted. And we also understand the causes of poverty and the conditions that perpetuate it. There was a time when poverty was considered to be an unavoidable fate, but such a view is no longer possible or responsible. Now we know that poverty is not simply a misfortune; it is an injustice.[79]

For Gutiérrez, the poor are not simply victims and he points out that "it is important to remember that to be poor is a way of life – it is a way

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77 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), viii.

78 Ibid., 292-293.

79 Gustavo Gutiérrez, interview by Daniel Hartnet, 3 February 2003: http://americamagazine.org/issue/420/article/remembering-poor-interview-gustavo-gutirrez (accessed 16 February 2015).

of thinking, of loving, of praying, of believing and hoping, of spending free time, of struggling for a livelihood."[80] He also speaks about the historical power of the poor as they spring up as signs of struggle and hope, challenging the oppressive situations in society through their commitment for liberation. In this struggle for liberation, some of them die before their time. Gutiérrez is convinced that "[O]nly from within the poor classes of Latin American society will it be possible to grasp the true meaning of the biblical cry for the defender of human rights,"[81] and for that reason "the ones the Bible calls the poor are not only the gospel privileged recipients, – but by that very fact – its messengers as well."[82] Moreover, "history must be read from a point of departure in their [the poor] struggles, their resistance, their hopes."[83]

1.4.1.3 Suffering and the Social Nature of Sin

The official teachings of the Church state that individuals must repent of their personal sins in order to reach eternal life. The emphasis is on individual sin; not sin as a social and historical fact. Gutiérrez criticises the way ecclesiastical authorities pervert the biblical notion of sin, because in his view, the ecclesial authorities spiritualise the biblical notion of sin and see it as a singularly individualised reality. Gutiérrez, while partly agreeing with the personal aspect of sin, the classic doctrine of sin, also draws attention to the social and historical aspect of it. According to him, "[S]in is regarded as a social, historical fact, the absence of brotherhood (*sic*) and love in relationships among men (*sic*), the breach of friendship with God and with other men (*sic*), and, therefore, an interior, personal factor."[84] Sin is the basic alienation and for that reason Gutiérrez claims that sin cannot be considered in the abstract.

It is important to understand that the personal aspect of sin has concrete manifestations in the social and historical spheres. Gutiérrez realises, from his own experience, that the majority of Latin Americans are oppressed

80 Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Option for the Poor" in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, eds. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (New York: Orbis Books,1993), 236.

81 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, 87.

82 Ibid., 105.

83 Ibid., 201.

84 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* 175.

by the existing economic structures and political systems due to the social and intra-historical nature of sin. He highlights the collective dimension of sin and the existence of sin as the root causes of the oppressive, unjust and exploitative social structures. Gutiérrez firmly states that sin is not only an impediment to salvation in the after-life but that it is also both a personal and social intra-historical reality; an obstacle to life's reaching fullness.[85]

Gutiérrez does not argue against the Church's affirmation of Christ's coming to liberate people from sin. His concern is that if sin is considered only to be a personal matter, then the understanding of the salvation of Christ becomes spiritualised or an otherworldly reality. Since sin is a barrier to people's relationships with God and with one another, the salvation of Jesus should be considered to imply reconciliation not only with God but with others. For Gutiérrez the social and historical aspects of sin are relevant elements in speaking of the fulfilment of salvation.[86]

1.4.1.4 Salvation and the Process of Liberation

Gutiérrez asks: "[W]hat is the relationship between salvation and the process of the liberation of man (*sic*) throughout history? .... What is the meaning of the struggle against an unjust society and the creation of a new man (*sic*) in the light of the Word?"[87] To illustrate these two areas, it is necessary to discuss creation and salvation as well as the radical notion of liberation.

1) Creation and Salvation

Speaking of the quantitative aspect of salvation – the universality of salvation and the visible Church as the mediator of salvation – Gutiérrez mentions two very well defined characteristics of salvation: (1) It is a cure for sins in *this life*; and (2) This cure is in virtue of a salvation to be attained *beyond this life*.[88] This quantitative question of salvation – the salvation of the pagans – is resolved and directed to the qualitative aspect of salvation: "[M]an (*sic*) is saved if he (*sic*) opens himself (*sic*) to God and to others, even if he (*sic*) is not clearly aware that he (*sic*) is doing so."[89] From this point of view, the traditional notion of salvation begins

85 Cf. Ibid., 152.
86 Cf. Ibid., 153.
87 Ibid., 149.
88 Cf. Ibid., 150.
89 Ibid., 151.

to change. Gutiérrez understands salvation as: "… the communion of men (*sic*) with God and the communion of men (*sic*) among themselves,"[90] which orients, transforms and guides history to its fulfilment.

Gutiérrez contends that the centre of God's salvific design is Jesus Christ and there are no two histories – one profane and one sacred. There is only one history assumed by Christ. Therefore, "[T]he history of salvation is the very heart of human history .... The historical destiny of humanity must be placed definitively in the salvific horizon."[91] The concept of salvation for Gutiérrez goes beyond the traditional attitude of keeping its believers aloof from worldly matters, and he sees the need to move beyond the individual when speaking of salvation.

Gutiérrez speaks of the relationship between creation and salvation as consisting of three areas of one process: (1) Creation: the first salvific act; (2) Political liberation: the self-creation of human beings; and (3) Salvation: re-creation and complete fulfilment.[92]

Firstly, Gutiérrez explains creation as the first act of salvation, a process that continues with the Exodus. Therefore, creation is, in his view, not simply a single act at the beginning. It is a process that comes through the creation of the nation of Israel and continues to the present day.[93] Secondly, the historical fact of liberation from Egypt is a political action. As it is told in the Bible, says Gutiérrez, Moses, sent by God, began a hard struggle for the liberation of the oppressed Israelites. It was a political liberation through which Yahweh expresses His (*sic*) love for His (*sic*) people and the gift of total liberation is received.[94] Gutiérrez clearly affirms that "[T]he creator of the world is the creator and the liberator of Israel ...."[95] Thirdly, Gutiérrez interprets the work of Christ as a new creation; the redemptive act of Christ is conceived as a re-creation, and is presented in a context of creation. Through the salvation of Christ, the whole of creation comes to fulfilment.[96] This understanding of salvation holds that salvation is not simply a religious or spiritual value, but something that has a link to real human life.

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90 Ibid., 152.
91 Ibid., 153.
92 Cf. Ibid., 154.
93 Cf. Ibid., 155.
94 Cf. Ibid., 156.
95 Ibid., 156.
96 Cf. Ibid., 158.

2) A Radical Liberation

The notion of sin as the root of injustice and exploitation demands a radical liberation, which necessarily implies a political liberation, broader than the traditional notion of liberation after death. Gutiérrez states, "[T]his radical liberation is the gift which Christ offers us."[97] He presents three levels of liberation, namely political liberation, the liberation of people throughout history, liberation from sin and admission to communion with God.[98]

At the first level of liberation, Gutiérrez affirms the idea of the elimination of the "proximate causes of poverty and injustice."[99] The poor people in Latin America suffer from the oppressive social structures, while Church teaching does not take this level of liberation into consideration. Therefore, he underlines the importance of addressing this basic level of liberation from the structures of oppression on the journey towards full liberation.

As regards the second level of liberation, Gutiérrez points out that many times in human history, the oppressed and the poor felt that their suffering was ordained by God's will. Sometimes Church teachings affirmed this idea. Therefore, there must be the hope for the poor that they are able to create new horizons, and they must not simply be designated as victims but as qualified 'subjects' of their own lives.[100] For Gutiérrez this is the joy in suffering, the joy that is the result of the hope that suffering can be overcome through awareness of the causes and circumstances of unjust social patterns.

The third level of liberation is the most radical one: the work of Jesus Christ. Agreeing with the Church teaching that the grace of God alone can overcome sin, Gutiérrez highlights the God who became poor among the poor. He criticises the Church for reducing the importance of this greatest act of God becoming poor. The Church teaches that God took upon Himself (*sic*) the human condition, which is different from God becoming poor. If God became poor among the poor, then all people should freely and radically be in solidarity with the poor with hope and love, says Gutiérrez.[101]

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97 Ibid., 176.

98 Cf. Ibid., 176.

99 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free: Confrontations,* trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 130.

100 Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 176.

101 Cf. Ibid., 177.

According to Gutiérrez, even though these three levels of liberation are not the same, they affect each other mutually in an all-encompassing salvific process. He understands liberation as a greater fulfilment of people and a pre-condition for the new society of communion between people and God and among people in society, which, although not the totality of salvation, is a salvific work. Without liberating historical events, there would be no fulfilment of salvation: "we can say that the historical, political liberating event *is* the growth of the kingdom (*sic*) and is a salvific event; but it is not *the* coming of the kingdom (*sic*) and, therefore, it also proclaims its fullness. This is where the difference lies."[102]

> … those who reduce the work of salvation are indeed those who limit it to the strictly 'religious' sphere and are not aware of the universality of the process ... it is those who in order to protect salvation (or to protect their interest) lift salvation from the midst of history, where men (*sic*) and social classes struggle to liberate themselves from the slavery and oppression to which other men (*sic*) and social classes have subjected them .... It is those who by trying to 'save' the work of Christ will 'lose' it.[103]

The process of liberation that Gutiérrez speaks of is a global one, effecting every dimension of human existence. Following Jesus is not only a private journey, but is part of a collective enterprise, says Gutiérrez.

A yet different approach to dealing with suffering is to see Job as a typical model of consciousness-raising among the poor.

1.4.1.5 God-Talk and the Unjust Suffering of Job

In the book, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, Gutiérrez speaks about the reality of the suffering of the innocent. In the experience of unjust suffering, Gutiérrez addresses the reality of all those who suffer through no fault of their own, particularly the poor in Latin America. The book asserts "… today's questions to be the questions of yesterday and of all times."[104]

Gutiérrez states that the book of Job in the Bible was written in a period of time when the conviction existed that poverty and sickness were

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102 Ibid., 177.

103 Ibid., 177-178.

104 Leonardo Boff, "The Originality of the Theology of Liberation," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, eds. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (New York: Orbis Books,1989), 41.

punishments for the sins of the individual or his/her family. This notion has its roots in the principle of retribution: God punishes the wicked and rewards the upright. In the book of Job, Satan's challenge to the righteous Job is based on this assumption. For Satan, a religious attitude can be explained only by the expectation of a reward. Gutiérrez argues that the central question of the book of Job is raised at the outset: "… the role that reward or disinterestedness plays in faith in God and in its consistent implementation."[105]

1) Job's Gradual Process of God-Talk in the Suffering

The questions Gutiérrez raised in his book are: How will Job speak of God in this situation? Will he reject God? Have Job's piety and uprightness perhaps been really based on his material prosperity? Will he curse God for having destroyed all that prosperity? The choice Job has is between a religion based on rights and obligations and a disinterested faith based on the gratuity of God's love.[106]

Gutiérrez recounts how while rejecting the prevailing doctrine of retribution of his time and replacing it with the light he received due to his personal experience and inner struggle, Job comes to the realisation that the suffering and injustice that mark the lives of the poor are not just their own personal experiences. Those who consider themselves believers in God must try to lighten the burden of the poor and suffering by practising solidarity with them. For this Gutiérrez suggests two types of language as a way of speaking to God in suffering: the language of prophecy and the language of contemplation.[107] Secondly, in the view of Gutiérrez, Job understands, "… the world of justice must be located within the broad but demanding horizon of freedom that is formed by the gratuitousness of God's love."[108]

2) The Language of Prophecy and the Language of Contemplation

Gutiérrez sees that moving away from a self-centred notion of suffering to the suffering of the poor in society has a deeper meaning, that

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105 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 4.

106 Cf. Ibid., 13-15.

107 Cf. Ibid., 15.

108 Ibid., 16.

is, taking the path of gratuitousness, and is not only a concern for justice. Prophetic language makes it possible to draw near to God who has a preference for the poor. With regard to the preferential option for the poor, he contends, "God has a preferential love for the poor not because they are necessarily better than others, morally or religiously, but simply because they are poor and living in an inhuman situation."[109] Gutiérrez suggests a different way of seeing the connection between God and the poor. For him, this prophetic language should be an expression of solidarity with those who are suffering and aligned with God's preferential option for the poor.

The second type of language is the language of contemplation, which is also a way of encountering God.[110] In the view of Gutiérrez, it is a way of moving from prophetic language to worship, a language of justice. While Job's friends talk *about* God, Job finds a way to speak *to* God. Job realises that his argument is not with his friends but with God. This is how Job begins to call for an explanation from his God. His friends find it impossible to follow him along this path, because their theology does not allow them to do so. Job finds out that everything comes from God, but this acceptance will not simply be resignation: Job's full encounter with God comes by way of complaint, bewilderment, and confrontation. This is how Job journeys forward even in the midst of his own pain and suffering in order to be another-oriented person, says Gutiérrez.[111]

Gutiérrez states that the language we use, basically depends on the situation we are in. The language of Job is a criticism of every theology that lacks human compassion and contact with reality. In a considerable shift from "an ethic centred on personal rewards to another focused on the needs of one's neighbour", Job understands the religious meaning of service to the poor.[112] Job takes a step on the way to speaking correctly about God. The God whom Job knows in the depths of his heart, wants justice, says Gutiérrez.

Gutiérrez's reflection on Job, the innocent sufferer, shows that God has historically been on the side of the poor and suffering. Therefore, "[I]t appeals to a historical tradition that places God against innocent suffering

109 Ibid., 94.

110 Cf. Ibid., 17.

111 Cf. Ibid., 25-30.

112 Cf. Ibid., 30-31.

as an advocate of those who suffer."[113] It is also obvious that when unjust human suffering develops into a social condition, there must be a protest against it. In this process, says Gutiérrez, God is on the side of the poor, because the suffering of the innocent is against the will of God.

1.4.1.6 The God of the Poor

Gutiérrez's writings are biblically inspired and portray the biblical God as a God who is close to human beings. God is a God of communion, hence God is present everywhere, especially in the very heart of the human being.[114] "Since God has become man, humanity is the living temple of God. The 'profane' that is located outside the temple, no longer exists."[115]

Gutiérrez recognises God to be the one who has historically been on the side of the poor – who has a preferential love for the poor – while being present in all of creation: "God is present among the poor because they are most in need of the liberating spirit which only God can provide."[116] Gutiérrez does not consider this to be an easy task, because it first requires a struggle with oneself and then with society. In biblical language, he argues that to love Yahweh is to do justice: "[T]he God of Biblical revelation is known through inter-human justice. When justice does not exist, God is not known; he (*sic*) is absent."[117]

1.5 Summary

Gutiérrez's praxis-oriented theology is a proto-ecclesial process. Since Gutiérrez defines theology as the second step of the first act of the contemplation of God and putting God's will into practice, he begins his theology from the viewpoint of historical praxis. For Gutiérrez, there is one human history, not one profane and one sacred, hence his way of doing theology does not begin from abstract and speculative systematic considerations. For Gutiérrez, the function of theology is a meeting between faith and reason, not exclusively faith and philosophy. His personal experience of being in solidarity with the poor and the suffering

113 Roger Haight, "The Logic of the Christian Response to Social Suffering," 143.

114 Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 192.

115 Ibid., 194.

116 Curt Cadorette, "Peru and Mystery of Liberation: The Nexus and Logic of Gustavo Gutiérrez's Theology," 55.

117 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 195.

suggests a model of reason in faith. It is a critical reflection that affects the life and faith-practice of the Church. This is a model that differs from the official position of the Magisterium of the Church.

The point of departure of the theology of Gutiérrez is God's option for the poor. To him it is useless to discuss any issue without addressing the issue of the suffering of the poor in society. His discovery of the poor has two key elements: (1) The poor are the victims of oppressive and unjust social structures; and (2) The poor are the agents of change if they are equipped with skills and hope to create new horizons. Gutiérrez opposes the Christian notion of giving a positive value to material poverty and of connecting poverty with fatalism. The suffering of the poor is scandalous and sinful, therefore something to be rejected.

For Gutiérrez, it is not enough to describe the suffering of the poor, it is also important to determine the cause of suffering. In relation to the suffering among the poor, he claims that human suffering cannot be seen as caused by accident or by fate. It is certainly caused by an oppressive system. Human suffering is (1) unjust; (2) social; and (3) structural. In speaking about the root cause of the suffering, that is, 'sin', he criticises the ecclesial hierarchy for perverting the biblical notion of sin by spiritualising it excessively. Gutiérrez challenges us to see both aspects of sin – individual and social – instead of limiting it only to personal or individual sinfulness.

Gutiérrez regards liberation from sin as overcoming both personal sinfulness and oppressive social structural sinfulness in particular, which necessarily means political liberation. Therefore Gutiérrez speaks of one human history: salvation cannot be something other-worldly. His understanding of salvation is a radical liberation, which necessarily implies a political liberation broader than the traditional notion of liberation in the after-life.

2. Christological Thinking: Jon Sobrino

2.1 A Biographical Sketch of Jon Sobrino

Jon Sobrino, a Spaniard who was born in 1938, is a Catholic priest and a theologian, known for his great contribution to liberation theology. He was a nineteen-year-old Jesuit novice when he arrived in El Salvador in 1957, desirous of serving that country as a missionary. Since the Jesuits in El Salvador did not have access to theological and philosophical studies

in that country, the young Sobrino was sent to the United States for five years, to study philosophy and civil engineering. He later studied theology in Frankfurt for seven years and earned the doctorate in theology.[118] His experience of studying in two different continents helped him to know the real situation of two worlds: the developed state of the First world and the poverty of the Third world.

Sobrino's studies in Frankfurt were influenced mainly by Thomistic theology and his initial studies were largely dogmatic. However, his work with German theologians such as Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann, helped him move away from more dogmatic concepts and to focus on the historical reality of Jesus. Sobrino acknowledged some years later that until 1974, he was not really conscious of the reality of his El Salvadoran 'homeland', even though he had lived there for several years.

> I must confess that until 1974, when I returned to El Salvador, the world of the poor – that is, the real world – did not exist for me. When I arrived in El Salvador in 1957, I witnessed appalling poverty, but even though I saw it with my eyes, I did not really see it; ... my vision of my task as a priest was a traditional one ... I was a typical 'missionary', full of goodwill and Eurocentricity – and blind to reality.[119]

On the night of November 16, 1989 the tragedy of the murder, by a unit of the Salvadoran military, of the six Jesuits at the Central American university and the woman who worked there together with her daughter, happened when Sobrino was away from the community. This was the main shock in his life:

> The six murdered Jesuits were my community, they were really my family. We had lived, worked, suffered, and enjoyed ourselves together for many years. Now they were dead …. I do not think I have ever felt anything like it …. It was the most important thing that had happened to me in my whole life …. I felt a real breakdown in my life and an emptiness that nothing could fill.[120]

Ignacio Ellacuria, who was murdered with the above mentioned six Jesuits, and also Oscar Romero were role models in Sobrino's life, having

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118 Cf. Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 1-2.

119 Ibid., 2-3.

120 Jon Sobrino, *Witnesses to the Kingdom: The Martyrs of El Salvador and the Crucified People* (New York: Orbis Books, 2015).

awakened him to the reality of his surroundings and to encountering the poor and suffering in his adopted El Salvadoran homeland. This awareness was, as Sobrino himself says, a paradigm shift from a 'sleep of inhumanity' to a 'reality of humanity'.[121] This is evident in his writings where the roots of his theology are in the suffering and the poor of Latin America.

The other challenging incident in his life happened on 26 November 2006, a number of years after the massacre of the aforementioned six Jesuits and the two women: the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Vatican issued a notification regarding Sobrino's Christology.

2.2 Basic Characteristics of Jon Sobrino's Theological Method

The main focus of Sobrino's theology is the 'signs of the times'. For Sobrino, the existing reality of the poor and suffering of the world is the most crucial point in his understanding of liberation theology.

> The mutual interaction between an active Christian praxis based on the Spirit of Jesus and firm hope in the Utopia of God's kingdom (*sic*) is the Christian expression of the hermeneutic circle required for any theological reflection.[122]

Sobrino's theology is based on three primary components, namely: Christology, the reign of God and martyrdom. His notion of liberation theology is a theology rooted in the historical Jesus and his experience in this world: "Liberation theology arose out of active praxis rather than static contemplation."[123] One cannot have a Christology without the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, states Sobrino. Since his aim is to start Christology from below, he grounds his Christology in the historical Jesus. One of the reasons Sobrino offers for starting with the historical Jesus is, "God's descent into history cannot be understood in its pure abstract formality, simply by accepting the great miracle and gift of this descent, but only when we examine what it really consists of. This reality is Jesus of Nazareth."[124]

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121 Cf. Ibid., 3.

122 Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* (New York: Orbis Books, 1978), xxv.

123 Ibid., 36.

124 Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 37.

Sobrino realises that many of his contemporary Christologists over-emphasise the divine presence in Jesus Christ, hence, he begins his Christology with the historical Jesus to make the point that the reign of God is here at present: "[T]he revelation of the Son in the history of Jesus shows us completely and definitively how human beings can correspond to the ultimate mystery of God in the midst of historical existence."[125] Another important reason for beginning Christology with the historical Jesus is, in Sobrino's opinion, that social and religious oppression in Latin America is very similar to the context in which Jesus lived.

In his book, *Jesus the Liberator*, Sobrino further highlights the mutual relationship between doing theology by writing history and writing history by doing theology. For him, this is what Latin American Christology tries to introduce. Therefore, his method is to begin with "something really happening today in history, the new image of Christ and faith in Christ, and this is not the usual procedure."[126] In this methodological approach of beginning from the standpoint of the poor, Sobrino considers that it is possible "to know Christ better, and it is this better-known Christ, we think, who directs us to where the poor are."[127]

2.3 The Theological Conceptualisation of Jon Sobrino

The experience of living in the situation of injustice in El Salvador in the 1970s and 1980s led Sobrino to see the world through the eyes of the poor and on their behalf. He claims, "[W]e have learnt to see God from the point of view of the victimised, and we have tried to see this world of the victimised from the point of view of God. We have learnt to exercise mercy and find joy and a purpose for life in doing so."[128] Sobrino makes the reader aware of the reality of an oppressed world and claims that it is our responsibility to change the world of suffering into a human world.

> There is a reality of sin, which has structural causes and kills a majority of the population, and an evident need to overcome this situation of death. Without doing this task, theology was neither human nor Christian. From here I re-thought the reign of God—as justice and fellowship—as the core of Jesus of Nazareth. I re-thought the historical Jesus, and following him,

125 Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads,* xxiv.

126 Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 22.

127 Ibid., 35.

128 Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 8.

> including centrally his compassion towards the poor, the announcement of good news to the oppressed and the denunciation of the oppressors. I insisted that for this he died on a cross, and I insisted that the risen Christ is a crucified Christ. The resurrection of Jesus was the reaction of God against the victimisers who killed the innocent. From the love of the crucified and from his rehabilitation on the part of God emerges hope. God is the God of life in a struggle against the idols that demand death for survival. What I discovered before, however, were 'the poor', massive and materially poor, oppressed and repressed, despised and ignored. And, paradoxically, I discovered as well that they have hope and the capacity to save us.[129]

These words of Sobrino, from an interview, explain his gradual process of deepening his theological reflection on praxis.

2.4 Jon Sobrino's Understanding of Suffering

2.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

Sobrino states that the final destiny of Jesus is the reign of God, not even God the Father (*sic*). As Jesus came following a tradition of hope, Sobrino says that Jesus did not exclude anyone from entering the reign of God. Sobrino highlights one significant point – even though Jesus did not want to exclude anyone, he undoubtedly expressed partiality for the poor. For Sobrino, the poor are the ones who are at the bottom of society in history, oppressed by those who are at the top.[130]

In the view of Sobrino, for Jesus and for the Christian Testament writers, the term 'poor' is a sociological category. The Synoptics also speak of the poor in the plural – as a group or a class. Sobrino explains that Jesus lived in a society where the poor were marginalised and he proclaimed that the reign of God belonged to the poor, the poor being those who have 'a conscious appreciation of the very fact of material poverty', the ones who have evangelising potentiality.[131] Affirming that the poor become the good news for the Church, Sobrino claims, "[T]hey [poor] are not just the builders of the kingdom (*sic*), but they bring good news …."[132]

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129 Jon Sobrino, interviewed by Joe Drexler-Dreis, September 2013: http://theo.kuleuven.be/en/research/centres/centr_lib/interview-with-jon-sobrino.pdf (accessed 10 February 2015).

130 Cf. Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 127.

131 Cf. Ibid., 125-128.

132 Ibid., 128.

Looking at suffering in the understanding of Jon Sobrino, it is essential to deal with the three key themes of his Christology: the cross, discipleship and the proclamation of the reign of God. Sobrino has discussed these three key themes in his first work, *Christology at the Crossroads,* and more deeply in his later work, *Jesus the Liberator.*

2.4.1.1 Abandonment of Jesus on the Cross

1) The Tendency to Bypass the Scandal of the Cross

Sobrino argues that the teaching of the Church about the cross usually remains on the level of pious contemplation as it eliminates the scandal of the historical cross of Jesus, describing the cross as "a mystique of sorrow and suffering."[133] Referring to the traditional perception of the cross in the Church, Sobrino claims, "… theology has tended to sidestep the task of reflecting on the cross itself."[134]

In the view of Sobrino, there are two major obstacles to any attempt to understand the cross of Jesus at a deeper level: (1) the danger of isolating the cross from the concrete history of Jesus; and (2) the danger of isolating it from God. He further says that the cross of Jesus was viewed only in the context of salvation and soteriology, which resulted in depriving it of its power and impact.[135] When speaking about the three fundamental points in post-resurrection faith, he firstly states that after the resurrection of Jesus there is a basic affirmation of God or a new definition of God – in this historical action of Jesus God reveals 'His (*sic*) ultimate essence as love: God is love'. Secondly, through the resurrection the soteriological impact of Jesus' history becomes clear to Christian understanding that Jesus was handed over to death for the sins of all and raised up for the justification of all. Thirdly, after the resurrection, followers of Jesus get the assertion that Jesus of Nazareth is really the Son of God.[136]

Sobrino notes that already in the Christian Testament, the importance of the cross – both as a reality and as a revelation of God – begins to fade. Apparently, the scandal of the cross was difficult to deal with. Since it was said that the Father (*sic*) raised Jesus, it was difficult to accept that he

133 Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads,* 179.

134 Ibid., 180.

135 Cf. Ibid., 181.

136 Cf. Ibid., 181-183.

was abandoned by the Father (*sic*) on the cross. The Christian Testament 'Christologies' began to concentrate on the titles that express Jesus' personal dignity and the nature of his mission in positive terms: Messiah, Lord and Son of God.[137]

In his Christology, Sobrino argues that in the Christian Testament the cross is not seen as revealing some authentic, though unsuspected, image of God, rather, the death of Jesus is seen to be eminently positive in so far as it brings salvation to human beings. Sobrino claims that there is a danger of treating salvation solely in terms of the spiritual life. Therefore, he asks how the cross can bring forgiveness for sin?[138]

In summary, Sobrino claims that after the resurrection of Jesus, the Christian faith initiated a theological understanding with the most basic assertion 'the man Jesus of Nazareth', who died a failure on the cross and was abandoned by God, is really and truly the Son of God. Gradually, however emphasis came to be placed on the latter part of that statement: Jesus is the Son of God.[139] Therefore, it is relevant to study what are the presuppositions that prevent our seeing the scandal of the cross and make us over-emphasise Jesus as the Son of God.

2) The Presuppositions that Block the Understanding of the Scandal of the Cross

In the history of the Church and of theology, Sobrino says, "[W]e find a similar tendency to bypass the scandal of the cross."[140] Both a concept of God that does not derive from the cross and a concept of cultic worship as sacrifice that does not derive from Jesus,[141] explain, according to Sobrino, the difficulty that people have in accepting the scandal of the cross and that prompts some theological strategies to avoid that scandal. Sobrino focuses on certain presuppositions that block an understanding of the radical meaning of the cross. He says that "[T]hey are not explicitly theological; rather, they have to do with general attitudes or people's overall theological outlook."[142]

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137 Cf. Ibid., 184-185.

138 Cf. Ibid., 188.

139 Cf. Ibid., 200.

140 Ibid., 190.

141 Cf. Ibid., 191.

142 Ibid., 195.

Firstly, Sobrino says, "[T]here is the fact that God's abandonment of the cross of Jesus was not taken seriously by later tradition, on the supposition that such abandonment was impossible."[143] Some Christian theologians, for example Origen (184/5-253/4), Cyril of Alexandria (376-444), and Augustine of Hippo had the view that sinners were abandoned by God. The other side of this idea was that anyone who was abandoned was a sinner. As a result, Sobrino says, it was impossible for these Christian theologians to speak about the abandonment of Jesus on the cross.

Secondly, Sobrino explains, "[T]he Greek metaphysical conception of God's being and perfection renders any theology of the cross impossible."[144] In Greek thought, suffering cannot be pictured as "a divine mode of being that would imply a contradiction."[145] The Greek epistemology, which was based on analogy and wonder, makes it impossible to recognise God in the cross of Jesus. In speaking about Anselm's theory of vicarious satisfaction, Sobrino notes that Anselm has been influenced by the Greek concept of *apatheia* – something like insensibility, sedateness or absence of effects – rather than by a biblical notion of God. As a result the ultimate flaw in that theory is that the "nexus between Jesus' death and salvation is viewed from the outside … it never gets inside the historical reality of Jesus and his Cross."[146]

Thirdly, Sobrino states that the tendency to view the cross in terms of the already-existing notion of a 'sacrifice', which was found in cultic worship, became another reason to bypass the scandal of the cross. The cross was then more and more seen as a religious symbol.

One way to begin to recover the pristine value of the cross is, says Sobrino, to consider it as the historical outcome and consequence of Jesus' own life.[147] On the basis of the above mentioned ideas, Sobrino concludes: "[T]he cross of Jesus was a scandal even for the first Christians, and so we see the witting or unwitting elaboration of theological models designed to eviscerate it."[148] It is, therefore essential to ask about the 'why' of the cross.

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143 Ibid., 191.

144 Ibid., 195.

145 Ibid., 196-197.

146 Ibid., 193.

147 Cf. Ibid., 181-182.

148 Ibid., 194.

In Sobrino's opinion, it is important to look at both the positive and negative aspects of the cross. Positively speaking, Jesus' cross brought about salvation, but negatively, this soteriological focus on the cross draws our attention away from God: "it tells us *that* God loved us, but it does not say *how* He himself (*sic*) loved us and liberated us."[149] Contrary to the Greek metaphysical concept of God's being, Sobrino thinks that a truly historical liberation theology must view "suffering as a mode of belonging to God", because the inability to suffer would be a contradiction of the basic Christian assertion that God is love.[150] For Sobrino, liberation theology must add to the notion of 'suffering' of Greek epistemology, a fount of knowledge that leads us to the concrete practice of transforming love.

2.4.1.2 The Violent Death of Jesus

Sobrino affirms strongly that Jesus died a violent death. In his analysis of the cross of Jesus, Sobrino raises two main questions: (1) Why was Jesus killed? – A historical question; and (2) Why did Jesus die? – A theological question.[151] Expanding his Christology, in his book *Jesus the Liberator,* Sobrino speaks about the cross of Jesus from his experience of the violence and suffering of the majority in El Salvador. He claims, "[T]he crucified people of the Third World are today the great theological setting, the *locus*, in which to understand the cross of Jesus."[152]

In answering the first question "why was Jesus killed?" Sobrino reiterates five important aspects related to the death of Jesus. Firstly, Jesus' end was not accidental but the culmination of a necessary historical process. Secondly, there were some people responsible for the persecution of Jesus and all of them belonged to groups in economic, political and religious structures at that time. Thirdly, the people whom Jesus chose – the 'poor' – did not appear among the people responsible for killing Jesus. Fourthly, the persecution arose because Jesus attacked the oppressors who justified oppression in the name of God. Finally, the conflict was not something isolated or accidental but was rather a process.[153] Sobrino also

149 Ibid., 190.

150 Cf. Ibid., 195-197.

151 Cf. Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 195.

152 Ibid., 196.

153 Cf. Ibid., 199-200.

says that Jesus himself did not interpret his death in terms of salvation but the idea was developed in the Christian Testament where it was seen as an expiatory sacrifice. By saying this, Sobrino does not mean that Jesus did not have a meaning for his death. He claims, "[H]e [Jesus] was killed ...because of his kind of life, because of what he said and what he did .... There is nothing mysterious in this; it is a frequent occurrence."[154]

In relation to the second question, "why Jesus died", Sobrino challenges the existing idea that Jesus died according to the definite plan of God to save humanity from sin. Sobrino rejects the idea of the Church Fathers that there is no salvation without the shedding of blood, but states: "[W]hat we must not do is to theoretically equate love and sacrifice, still less assert that God was pleased by or even demanded Jesus' cross."[155] What pleased God was the fullness of love but not the sacrifice, the cross was the result of Jesus' whole life, says Sobrino. The cross of Jesus conveys the message that "God has irrevocably drawn near to this world, that he (*sic*) is a God 'with us' and a God 'for us'."[156]

2.4.1.3 God's Response to the Suffering of Jesus on the Cross

Sobrino states that great theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and Augustine of Hippo have tried to soften the image of God who abandoned Jesus on the cross. In a passage about Jesus' real relationship to his God when he died, Sobrino states that when all the evidence is taken together, the outcome is that what is heard from God is mostly silence rather than a word of closeness. In this silence, God suffered on the cross of Jesus. Therefore, says Sobrino, it is impossible to think of the cross as an arbitrary plan of God or as a punishment from God. It is rather a radical way of God drawing close to the Son in love and for love. Sobrino speaks about God as a 'crucified God' – a God of solidarity. This suggests that God wanted to reveal God's solidarity not only with Jesus but also with all the victims of the world, argues Sobrino. In his view, "[I]f from the beginning of the gospel God appears in Jesus as a God with us, if throughout the gospel God shows himself (*sic*) as a God for us, on the cross he (*sic*) appears as a God at our mercy and, above all, as a God like us."[157]

154 Ibid., 209.

155 Ibid., 228.

156 Ibid., 232.

157 Ibid., 245.

Sobrino claims that the crucified God's suffering on the cross reveals that God fights against human suffering in order to express solidarity with the sufferings of the world. Furthermore, he says that this crucified God reveals that "there can be no liberation from sin without the bearing of sin..."[158] In his reflection on the theology of the cross, Sobrino describes the relationship between the cross and the crucified people, which will be explained in the next paragraph.

2.4.1.4 The Suffering of Jesus and the Crucified People

> 'Crucified people' is useful and necessary language at the real level of fact, because 'cross' means death and death is what the Latin American people are subjected to in thousands of ways. It is slow but real death caused by the poverty generated by unjust structures – institutionalised violence – the poor are those who die before their time.[159]

The crucified people are a sign of the times, or more profoundly, they are the sacramental signs of the active presence of God, says Sobrino. In *Jesus in Latin America,* Sobrino includes three main points to demonstrate the importance of the poor and the outcasts: (1) Today the poor and the outcasts make up the majority of the human race; (2) They are not only the sum total of individuals but also collectives made up of social groups; and (3) They are treated as people without dignity.[160] In Sobrino's view, it is meaningless for any theologian to speak about theology based on the truths of the faith in the abstract while neglecting the reality of the suffering people in society.

Sobrino states, "[S]ome analyse what the cross has to say about Jesus, about Jesus' Father (*sic*) and speak of 'the crucified God', but it is unusual to analyse what this same cross has to say about Jesus' body in history."[161] He also refers to the traditional notion of the cross in relation to individual suffering, which he feels is given a deeper meaning when the suffering of the body of Christ is understood as the crucified people as a whole. Regarding the term 'crucified people', Sobrino remarks that it is a

158 Ibid., 246.

159 Jon Sobrino, "The Crucified People: Yahweh's Servant Today," *Voices from the Third World: Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* xiv, no. 1 (June, 1991): 87.

160 Cf. Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 141.

161 Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator,* 254.

useful and necessary category when speaking on factual, historical-ethical and religious levels.

Sobrino stresses not only the poverty of society but also its death, which is a reality for the people of the Third World. Sobrino recalls the words of Gutiérrez, "poor are those who die before their time."[162] In the view of Sobrino, the historical-ethical aspect reminds us that the 'death' mentioned here is not just any death, but a death inflicted by unjust social structures. Therefore, to die crucified does not mean simply to die, but to be put to death, which means that there are victims and there are executioners. Sobrino claims that the Third World people's crosses are inflicted by the various oppressive powers in society. Finally, he says, the cross is the death of Jesus and this is fundamentally related to faith, sin and grace. When speaking about the reality of the suffering people in the Third World, Sobrino says, "it is right to use the terminology of the cross."[163]

According to Sobrino, the Christology developed in Latin America sees the situation of the crucified people as similar to Yahweh's Suffering Servant on the basis of two fundamental facts, namely; (1) The Suffering Servant is a historical fact; and (2) The Suffering Servant is a saving mystery.[164] The normal condition of the crucified people is hunger, sickness, poverty and loneliness. Like the Servant, the crucified people are also despised and rejected by others; they are guilty of death because they decide to establish justice in their unjust structures: "[T]he crucified people point us to Jesus and help us to understand that the crucified Jesus is the Servant and why faith has proclaimed him as the Servant."[165]

Crucified People as Bearers of Salvation

> The Church of the poor claims no monopoly on the experience of God or on the understanding of Jesus, but it does believe that it can relieve more adequately Jesus' original experience of God within its own channel.[166]

While challenging the theory of the 'vicarious model' for understanding the redemption of Christ, Sobrino says: "[T]his model does

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162 Gustavo Gutiérrez, quoted by Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 254.

163 Ibid., 255.

164 Cf. Ibid., 255.

165 Ibid., 258.

166 Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1985), 129.

not illuminate what salvation the cross brings, far less what historical salvation the cross brings today."[167]

Sobrino perceives that the crucified people are the actualisation of Jesus Christ crucified, the true servant of Yahweh, and they are chosen by God to bring forth justice to the nations. This is true not only for Jesus' mission but also for the mission of the crucified people in the present society, says Sobrino: "[T]hey are the people who offer values that are not offered elsewhere."[168] They have evangelising potential, they offer hope, great love and faith, they are ready to forgive their oppressors and they have generated solidarity.

Sobrino claims that the crucified people remind society that to be a human being is to be co-responsible with other fellow humans, especially with the poorest and the suffering. In his opinion, throughout history the crucified people have sown the seeds of solidarity as a way of living human life. Among the crucified people there are those who end their lives like the Suffering Servant because they give their lives for the common goal of solidarity. These crucified people are the ones who bring salvation to the world from below. Sobrino furthermore states that they, like the Suffering Servant, bear the sins of the world that caused death but they do not bear the guilt of sin. Just as the Suffering Servant brings light to the people, the crucified people become a light for the whole of humanity. On the one hand crucified people demand conversion, and on the other they offer the possibility of conversion with the gospel values of solidarity, service and simplicity. Like the Suffering Servant, crucified people too, Sobrino claims, offer an active hope, which is demonstrated in the work and the struggle for liberation. Finally, in Sobrino's view, the crucified people, like the Servant, claim that love is possible through the countless numbers that have been martyred. They challenge their oppressors by showing that gratuity is possible.[169]

Sobrino sees a connection between the Suffering Servant and Jesus and identifies the Suffering Servant with the crucified people in the Third World, especially in Latin America. Sobrino's analysis of the crucified people portrays that they are not simply victims of the oppressive social structures but they are the ones bringing salvation to the world from

167 Jon Sobrino, "The Crucified People: Yahweh's Servant Today," 92.

168 Ibid., 95.

169 Cf. Ibid., 94-95.

below: "[I]t is scandalous, but unless we accept it in principle, it would be pointless to repeat that the crucified Christ has taken upon himself and got rid of the sin of the world."[170]

2.5 Summary

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus are key themes in Sobrino's theological thinking. His theological reflections begin with the historical person of Jesus and his option for the poor. Sobrino sees the connection between the suffering of Jesus and the poor in today's context. As he connects the reality of suffering with his theology of the cross, he perceives the crosses of the poor who suffer and die due to the sin of the society/ historical sin in relation to the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ: suffering and hope. He opposes the traditional Christian attempt to keep the cross of Jesus on the level of pious contemplation while bypassing the aspect of its scandal.

Sobrino's methodical approach is 'from below' whereas the official teaching of the Church begins its theology 'from above' with the statements about Christ's divinity. Direct engagement with the poor opened a new window for him to see the world in a new way. Hence, the world of the poor becomes for him the locus for theology; the proper place to begin his theology. Sobrino's starting point is the signs of the time; for his theology he regards the crucified people as the principle sign of the time. His methodical presupposition identifies the foundation of Christianity with the Church of the poor.

The poor become good news for the Church because in Sobrino's view the situation of the crucified people is similar to Yahweh's Suffering Servant. They are the bearers of salvation. In his Christology, he connects today's martyrs, especially the people who die due to the unjust social system in Latin America, with Jesus. Sobrino recognises Jesus as a martyr and with this understanding he calls martyrs in Latin America 'Jesuanic martyrs', because he claims that these people participate in the death of Jesus.

Sobrino recognises the God who was with Jesus in his sufferings, and this suffering God is not only with Jesus but also with those who are suffering due to unjust and inhuman social structures. Sobrino claims that

170 Jon Sobrino, "The Crucified People: Yahweh's Servant Today," 94.

God's solidarity with the violent death of Jesus, was God's stand against human suffering: God is on the side of the poor.

For Sobrino, understanding suffering, sin, salvation in history and being engaged in it, practically helps one to understand Scripture and doctrine. As he says, theological reflections should be praxis-oriented and not be limited to advancing theological knowledge for its own sake: "[T]he finality of liberation theology is the liberation of a suffering world and its transformation into the reign of God."[171] The ultimate reason for this practical orientation is, as Sobrino says, two pre-theological options: the eruption of the poor as the major fact of our times, and mercy as the most appropriate response.

3. The Solidarity of the Crucified God: Jürgen Moltmann

3.1 A Biographical Sketch of Jürgen Moltmann

Jürgen Moltmann, born in 1926, is a German Protestant theologian and a pastor whose works are widely known. He is the second of five children. His elder brother died of pneumonia in 1940. Moltmann says, "… his fate brother and our parents' consequent suffering made a deeper mark on my youth than I realised."[172] Moltmann's childhood was not pleasant, because it was plagued by fear of failure. He was productive neither at home nor in school. His father, whom Moltmann considered to be highly intelligent, was a source of discouragement, yet his grandmother did believe in her son and encouraged him. He speaks about the changes that happened in his life while his father was away in 1939:

> I was proud and happy to take over many of his tasks in home and garden and to queue for hours in all the shops with our ration books. Sad although the reason was, I blossomed and came to myself once my father was away. For me, 1939 brought the end of a childhood in which I had suffered through a lack of orientation.[173]

171 Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, "Explanatory Note on the Notification on the Works of Father Jon Sobrino": http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20061126_nota-sobrino_en.html#_ftnref1 (accessed 10 February 2015).

172 Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broader Place: An Autobiography*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 2007), 9.

173 Ibid., 8.

Unlike his father other family members trusted Moltmann to do things in life he had never expected of himself. They complimented one another harmoniously, which helped him overcome his sufferings.

The youth of Moltmann was spent in the German military during the Second World War even though his dream was to study in the fields of Mathematics and Physics. In the military, Moltmann witnessed the brutal destruction of his fellow citizens during wartime. Finally this young German soldier was sent by the British to a prison camp in Scotland. When he was in this barbed-wire-enclosed camp, all his dreams about life seemed to have collapsed, yet his Scottish captors consciously or unconsciously opened a way to this young broken-hearted soldier by giving him a Bible. This was Moltmann's first exposure to a Bible, as he was brought up in a non-religious background. This event led him to liberation and hope, later to become a Protestant theologian. In his own words:

> I read the book [Bible] in the evening without much understanding until I came upon the Psalms of lament in the Old Testament. Psalm 39 caught my attention particularly .... Then I read Mark's Gospel as a whole and came to the story of the passion; when I heard Jesus' death cry 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' I felt growing within me the conviction: this is someone who understands you completely, who is with you in your cry to God and has felt the same forsakenness you are living in now.[174]

It is not a mistake to consider this event as a foundational source of Moltmann's theology. When he was a prisoner in the period 1945-1948, Moltmann experienced God as the power of hope and as the God who is present in suffering. These two themes of 'hope' and 'suffering' became the two main themes in his first two theological works: *The Theology of Hope and The Crucified God.* His experience during and after the war, in the wake of collective suffering, set him on the road to theological involvement with public and political issues.[175]

3.2 Basic Characteristics of Jürgen Moltmann's Theological Method

Moltmann writes his first three books specifically as a Protestant theologian within a German context. Later on, with his openness to the

174 Ibid., 30.

175 Cf. Richard Bauckham, *Theology of* Jürgen *Moltmann* (London: T and T Clark, 1995), 2.

reality of the whole world, he comes to the realisation that he has to broaden his method of doing theology.

> Even when I was still working on *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (1975), I realised that I would not be able to continue using the method 'the whole of theology in a single focus .... It also became clear to me between 1975 and 1980 that I personally could not authentically form a 'theology in context' and a 'theology in movement' (liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology) for I am not living in the Third World, am not oppressed and am not a woman.[176]

With a new-found awareness of liberation theology, Moltmann changed his theological method: "I no longer presented the whole work of theology in a single focus, but now viewed *my 'whole' as a part* belonging to a wider community, and as my contribution to theology as a whole."[177] He committed himself to formulating his own contributions while being aware of the teachings and voices of the patristic, medieval, reformation and modern theologians, especially the voices of the present reality in different contexts. His contributions are not offered in the form of a dogma or system, they are suggestions. Furthermore, Moltmann says that his proposed concepts will be more revolutionary than an 'unconventional' contextual and praxis-oriented theology.[178]

Moltmann's personal life experiences, his contacts with contemporary philosophy and his concern for the poor have shaped his theological methodology. As a consequence, throughout his academic career he has been very careful not to fall into theological abstractionism.

3.3 The Theological Conceptualisation of Jürgen Moltmann

Throughout his writings Moltmann's concern, even amidst suffering and pain, is not "why is God letting this happen? But, rather, where is God? Is God far away from us, absent, in his (*sic*) heaven? Or is God among us, suffering with us? Does God share in our suffering?"[179] The first question is

176 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), vii.

177 Ibid., vii.

178 Cf. Ibid., viii.

179 Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God Yesterday and Today: 1972-2002," in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 70.

a theoretical question: accusing God of the pain of the victims. The second one is an existential question: communion with God in suffering. The first question assumes a God who is apathetic, untouchable and an almighty God, whereas the second question is a searching for a compassionate God or a fellow sufferer.

3.4 Jürgen Moltmann's Understanding of Suffering

In Moltmann's theological understanding, the answer to the question/s of suffering is/are to be understood within his concept of the involvement of the Trinitarian God who saved humanity from sin and suffering by the act of solidarity with the suffering of all humanity. This is how he sees the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus Christ: God became flesh and entered into the suffering of all creation. Hence, it is significant to evaluate how Moltmann looks at the suffering of God in relation to the suffering of Jesus Christ and the suffering of all humanity.

3.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

3.4.1.1 Understanding Suffering within a 'New Situation' of God

While the traditional Christian understanding of God is the immutable, impassable and almighty powerful God who does not suffer like His (*sic*) creatures, Moltmann speaks about a God who is capable of suffering in His (*sic*) love towards people. In the suffering of Christ, Moltmann recognises *not a new God* but a new '*situation' of God*: a compassionate God who suffers with His (*sic*) Son Jesus. In speaking about the possibility of a suffering God, Moltmann deems, it is essential to abandon the notion of apathy as a starting point, which is highly influenced by the Greek notion of God.[180]

Moltmann claims, "[F]or a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect Him (*sic*). And because He (*sic*) is so completely insensitive, He (*sic*) cannot be affected or shaken by anything .... But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So He (*sic*) is also a loveless being."[181] He challenges Aristotle's understanding of God, saying, "Aristotle's God cannot love; He (*sic*) can

180 Cf. Ibid., 181.

181 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 222.

only be loved by all non-divine beings by virtue of His (*sic*) perfection and beauty .... The 'unmoved Mover' is a 'loveless beloved'."[182] Lastly, in speaking about the Aristotelian God, he asks: is He (*sic*) a God? Is He (*sic*) not rather a stone?

In the view of Moltmann, "God does not suffer as we do, out of deficiency of being, but God does suffer from love for creation which is the overflowing superabundance of God's divine being. In this sense, God can suffer, will suffer, and is suffering in the world."[183]

3.4.1.2 The Crucified Jesus and the Doctrine of the Trinity

The suffering of Jesus is a controversial issue in Moltmann's theology in which he claims that God actually suffers. For Moltmann the meaning of the terrible happenings on Golgotha is twofold: (1) God could be beside us in our suffering – God's solidarity with us; (2) God could be there for us in our guilt – God's atoning intervention for us.[184]

Moltmann brings out the idea that the crucified Jesus was seen less as the sacrifice which God creates to reconcile the world to Himself (*sic*), and more as the exemplary path trodden by a righteous man suffering unjustly, leading to salvation.[185] Moltmann claims that many have tended to focus on the mystical suffering of Jesus, which brought an assurance of salvation and of glorification, rather than of being in fellowship with Christ.

> In historic Christianity, the passion of Christ has also been understood and relived in the sense of the mysticism of suffering ... fellowship with God is not attained by outward sacrifice and presence in the church's cult; the way to glory leads through personal suffering. Thus by meditation and adoration people have drawn closer to the sufferings of Christ, participated in them and felt them as their own suffering …. This spiritual absorption into the sufferings of Christ led, as late Medieval mysticism said, to a conformity of the soul with the crucified Christ.[186]

Moltmann contends that not only the cross needs to be considered but Jesus' whole life, as the cross was the result of his way of life. The

182 Ibid., 222.

183 Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God Yesterday and Today: 1972-2002," 75.

184 Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1994), 38-39.

185 Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 45.

186 Ibid., 45.

traditional approach to the cross is soteriological, emphasising the question what the cross of Christ does mean for our redemption. Moltmann's question, however, is a theological one: what does the cross mean for God Himself (*sic*)?[187]

Moltmann uses Trinitarian language to understand what happened on the cross. He interprets the cross of Jesus as a divine event – an event between Jesus and his God and Father (*sic*) and the Spirit. In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann says, "[T]he content of the doctrine of the Trinity is the real cross of Christ himself."[188] For him, all of the Trinitarian persons are involved in the act of redemption and it is, therefore, irrelevant to speak about the cross of Jesus without talking about the relationship existing within the Triune God.

In Moltmann's view, Jesus experienced dying in forsakenness on the cross, while the Father (*sic*) experienced the death of the Son Jesus Christ. When Jesus suffers, Moltmann says, the Father (*sic*) suffers too. The suffering of the Father (*sic*) is different from the suffering of the Son. Moltmann claims, "[T]he Son suffers, in his love, being forsaken by the Father (*sic*) as he dies. The Father (*sic*) suffers, in his (*sic*) love, the grief of the death of the Son."[189] In this view, whatever takes place in this event between the Father (*sic*) and the Son has to be understood "as the spirit of the surrender of the Father (*sic*) and the Son ...."[190] Distancing himself from the traditional interpretation of Jesus' death as an event in the divine-human nature of Jesus, Moltmann interprets the death of Jesus as a Trinitarian event between the Son and the Father (*sic*) in the Spirit – an event between God and God.[191] In summary, "[T]he theology of the cross must be the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the Trinity must be the theology of the cross."[192] For Moltmann, 'the material principle of the doctrine of the Trinity is the cross of Christ. The formal principle of knowledge of the cross is the doctrine of the Trinity.

In *Trinity in the Kingdom of God,* Moltmann supplements 'the unitary testimony of the cross' with other grounds for the Trinitarian doctrine.

187 Cf. Ibid., 46.
188 Ibid., 246.
189 Ibid., 245.
190 Ibid., 245.
191 Cf. Ibid., 245.
192 Ibid., 241.

Even there 'the cross is at the centre of the Trinity'. Moltmann, therefore, consistently maintains throughout his corpus that "the shortest expression of the doctrine of the Trinity is the divine act of the cross, in which the Father (*sic*) allows the Son to sacrifice himself through the Spirit."[193] Moltmann holds the notion that the form of the Trinity, which is revealed in the giving up of the Son (i.e. the cross) appears as follows: (1) The Father (*sic*) gives up his (*sic*) own Son to death in its most absolute sense, for us; (2) The Son gives himself up, for us; (3) The common sacrifice of the Father (*sic*) and the Son comes about through the Holy Spirit, who joins and unites the Son in his forsakenness with the Father (*sic*).[194] Moltmann speaks about God in the suffering and humiliation of the cross of Jesus. In his Trinitarian thinking about the cross, he considers the suffering God as the centre of Christian theology. Moltmann's understanding is that this forsakenness of Jesus was the deepest solidarity with forsaken humanity in society.

3.4.1.3 Jesus' Forsakenness and Human Suffering

> When God becomes man in Jesus of Nazareth, he (*sic*) not only enters into the finitude of man, but in his death on the cross he also enters into the situation of man's (*sic*) Godforsakenness. The suffering in the passion of Jesus is abandonment, rejection by God, his Father (*sic*).[195]

For Moltmann, Jesus' forsakenness was the deepest expression of his love and solidarity with forsaken men and women in society. The suffering and death of Jesus were the divine identification with those who are suffering in this world: "[I]n the faces of the poor, we 'see' the face of the crucified God."[196] The suffering of Jesus was not exclusive but rather inclusive, which means it includes our sufferings too. Moltmann connects Jesus' experience of Godforsakenness on the cross to the Godforsakenness of the Church of the crucified: suffering of the poor, the oppressed and the outcasts in the world.

> ... anyone who cries out to God in their suffering echoes the death-cry of the dying Christ, the Son of God. In that case God is not just a hidden someone set over against him (*sic*), to whom he (*sic*) cries, but in a profound sense

193 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 241.

194 Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 83.

195 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 276.

196 Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope* (Croydon: CPI Group, 2012), 6.

> the human God, who cries with him (*sic*) and intercedes for him (*sic*) with his (*sic*) cross where man (*sic*) in his (*sic*) torment is dumb.[197]

In speaking about the meaning of Jesus' solidarity with the poor, Moltmann says that this does not mean that the Jesus of the poor has always been the crucified Jesus. The more the poor and the suffering understand the cross of Jesus, the more they are 'liberated from their submission to fate and apathy in suffering'. Then the devotion of the poor to the cross becomes different from what has been attributed to the cross by the traditional preconception of religion, argues Moltmann. In his view, the poor find in Jesus Christ "a God who does not torture them, as their masters do, but becomes their brother and companion."[198]

Moltmann states that Jesus became poor and emptied himself to devote himself to the liberation of the poor from their suffering. Accordingly, those who follow Jesus identify themselves with the crucified Jesus who suffered on their behalf. The traditional Christian regard for poverty cannot be Christian "[I]f it simply gives a religious blessing to the situation of the poor; promising them compensation in heaven, so that on earth the poor become poorer and the rich become richer."[199] The poverty and the suffering of Jesus are to be understood only by participation in his mission.

According to Moltmann the redeeming love of God takes all the sufferings and cries of human beings into God through Jesus Christ. He connects the cry of Jesus on the cross with the suffering of the world's most vulnerable, claiming that remaining in Christ will redeem suffering. While building on the ideas of St. Paul, based on his dialectical methodology in his early work, Moltmann claims that the resurrection of Jesus Christ has revealed the hope of resurrection from the dead. This is the dialectical way of seeing the crucifixion and resurrection. As Jesus is the crucified one, the glory of the resurrection too belongs to himself. By saying so, Moltmann claims that in Jesus there is meaning for our suffering, because ultimately it is redeemed by the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Hence, when people understand the real meaning of the suffering of Jesus, they do not become 'imitators' of their brother Jesus, but accept his mission and actively follow him.[200] Moltmann explains: "the perfection of Christ can be witnessed in

197 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 252.

198 Ibid., 49.

199 Ibid., 52.

200 Cf. Ibid., 51.

this violent world only through the fundamental readiness and willingness to suffer and to place oneself in a position of defenceless martyrdom."[201] Those who see in Jesus' passion nothing more than the suffering of a good man must certainly view God as a cold, silent and unloving heavenly power.[202] Therefore, Moltmann in his reflection states, "… life in communion with Christ is full life in the Trinitarian situation of God."[203]

3.4.1.4 The Theology of Hope within 'This-Worldly' Transformation

Speaking about an eschatological concept, known as 'the doctrine of the last things', Moltmann says:

> These end events were to break into this world from somewhere beyond history, and to put an end to history in which all things have lived and moved. But the relegating of these events to the 'last day' robbed them of their directive, uplifting and critical significance for all the days which are spent here, this side of the end.[204]

Moltmann's theology of hope expresses the conviction that eschatology is essential, but authentic Christian eschatology should emphasise this-worldly eschatology, the driving force for this-worldly transformation. He speaks of a universal eschatology, the salvation of all humanity. Even though his emphasis is not on life after death, Moltmann speaks of individual participation in the eschatological reign of God. It should not hinder the task of a world transforming activity. The central points of his theology of hope are the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. For him the resurrection is not the end of the promise of God: it is hope. Moltmann's understanding of the promise of God is not that it is something that could be reached by withdrawing from the world. His idea is that we have to participate actively in the world in order to participate in the coming of the new world.[205]

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201 Jürgen Moltmann, "Political Discipleship of Christ Today," in *In Communities of Faith and Radical Discipleship*, ed. G. Mcleod Bryan (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 16.

202 Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 43.

203 Ibid., 43.

204 Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 15.

205 Cf. Ibid., 15-20.

3.5 Summary

Moltmann's understanding of suffering presents some important considerations based on the image of God, the crucifixion of Jesus, discipleship in Jesus and salvation. Moltmann has used Trinitarian language to understand Jesus' crucifixion. His interpretation of the cross and the suffering of Jesus is, that it was a Trinitarian process. For Moltmann, the cross of Jesus is the salvific act of God. He reconsiders the immutability of God, instead affirming a God who is capable of love and suffering.

The 'new situation of God' suggested by Moltmann is different from the traditional Christian doctrine of the impassibility of God. Moltmann speaks of a God who is compassionate, capable of suffering as a result of which He (*sic*) suffered with the Son on the cross and even suffers with all the people who suffer in the world. Therefore, Moltmann emphasised the need to abandon the Greek notion of the immutability of God.

Moltmann recognises the face of the crucified God in the face of the poor and affirms God's presence among the people who are suffering in the world today. The suffering of Jesus includes the sufferings of people. Just as Jesus was forsaken by God, the suffering people also undergo Godforsakenness in their day-to-day lives. Therefore, Moltmann emphasises the need to be in solidarity with the poor and the suffering in society and claims that the cross should give us the motivation to suffer in love for our fellow human beings as Jesus did for us. In the view of Moltmann, when one suffers in love, God is there, suffering with him/her. Therefore, the more one loves the more one suffers.

The core of Moltmann's soteriology is the cross of Christ. A soteriological approach only to the cross is not sufficient, how it effects God is equally important. Moltmann's theology of hope, points to the universal eschatological salvation of all humanity. He emphasises participation in the eschatological reign of God while actively participating in the present world through involvement in the process of social and political change. For him Christianity is eschatology: it is hope.

To conclude, in relation to Moltmann's notion of suffering, it is important to note what he said two years later, after the assassination of six well-known Jesuits, their house-keeper and her daughter: "[T]wo years later I made a pilgrimage to the grave of the martyrs and found my book,

Id Dio Crucificado [The Crucified God], there under glass, as a sign and symbol of what really happened in this place."[206]

Final Reflection

As discussed in the second part of the present chapter, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino and Jürgen Moltmann are careful not to fall into theological abstractionism. Their understanding and theologies of suffering are rooted in praxis, and accordingly, they are critical about the existing traditional interpretations of suffering in the Church. The two Catholic liberation theologians and the Protestant theologian, being rooted in a praxis where many people are suffering in poverty, view suffering from the eyes of the poor – 'crucified people' or 'non-persons'. For them, suffering is the result of social sinfulness and without removing this social sinfulness, the salvation the Church speaks of in relation to the next life will not be complete. They challenge the prevailing doctrines of God, sin, salvation and the theology of the cross. Paying attention to the liberating aspect of Jesus' mission on earth, they highlight the importance of commitment to the mission of the liberation of the poor as God too takes the side of the poor. The two liberation theologians appreciate the martyrs who have offered their lives for the 'poor' in their struggle for true liberation.

Gustavo Gutiérrez's main emphasis is on 'non-persons' rather than on 'non-believers', because for him non-persons are the ones who are not recognised as people. Nevertheless, in the view of Gutiérrez, God is on the side of the poor/non-persons due to which he recognises God as the 'God of the poor'. For Sobrino, the poor or the crucified people in the unjust social and political system of his continent reflect the suffering and death of Jesus who offered himself for his people. In his understanding of Jesus as a martyr, Sobrino recognises the crucified people as martyrs who participate in the suffering and the death of Jesus. Hence, the crucified people are the bearers of salvation who bring light to the world through their martyrdom. For Moltmann, Christianity is hope and it is the key theme in his theology. He speaks about a new situation of God who is compassionate and capable of suffering as He (*sic*) suffered with Jesus on the cross. Moltmann emphasises the glory of God who raised Jesus from the dead, which he interprets as hope.

206 Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God Yesterday and Today: 1972-2002," 80.

All three theologians have the tendency to take the side of the oppressed, especially the poor, and they do not consider the suffering of the poor as a punishment from God or as the fate of the suffering people. Their main effort is to highlight the need to release the poor from their suffering.

While these two Catholic liberation theologians and the Protestant theologian are critical of the Church's traditional teachings on suffering, many feminist theologians appreciate them because they do their theology from the perspective of the oppressed and assert the need to overcome suffering without glorifying suffering in oppressive social structures. However, many feminist theologians are critical of some of the notions of the liberation theologians' effort of encouraging the value of voluntary suffering or self-sacrificial love. According to the majority of feminist theologians, in particular women are the ones who are called to sacrifice themselves in their role as women in general and in particular as wives and mothers and also in their belonging to the poor. Many liberation theologians do not recognise male domination and oppression of women as a major issue in relation to the unjust social structures that liberation theologians highlight repeatedly. The experiences of the women who are oppressed in society due to their race, sex and class challenge both traditional and liberation theology's view of suffering. Hence, many feminist theologians search for a theological understanding that reflects the experience of oppressed women. The next part of the chapter will deal with reflection on suffering from the standpoint of feminist theologians who perceive suffering in relation to the daily experience of women who are the oppressed in many societies.

III. The Feminist Critique of Suffering

Introduction

According to many feminist theologians, even though suffering is a common aspect in human life, it is especially a reality in the lives of women in many societies. Both men and women are oppressed in existing social structures that marginalise them due to their ethnicity, social status, class and caste. Despite these elements that are common to both men and women, in many societies women are marginalised within the patriarchal structures in society just because they are born women. Women are not

a homogenous group, therefore 'the' woman does not exist. Women of different colour, lower social status, lower caste and lower class are the people who suffer most in society. As a result, many feminist theologians understand suffering from the perspective of the lived experience of women who are suffering in their societies.

Feminist theologians are very critical of the understanding of suffering in the traditional teachings of Christianity. Being aware of this, the current section will discuss suffering in Christian theological thinking from the perspective of three feminist theologians: Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid, who are critical about the official teachings and some prominent ideas of the Christian Churches and their view of male theologians. Therefore, we will also discuss how these three feminist theologians move beyond the understanding of suffering as expressed by the two Catholic and one Protestant theologians discussed in the previous section.

1. Life-Line Politics of Black Women: Delores S. Williams

1.1 A Biographical Sketch of Delores S. Williams

Delores Williams was born in 1937. She is an African-American first generation womanist theologian and a Paul Tillich professor emeritus at Union Theological seminary, one of the best places of theological education in the USA.[207] It will be more practical to begin the sketch of Williams's life with her own words, which suggest that one should begin one's theological reflection with one's autobiography, a common practice among feminist theologians.

> I HAVE COME TO BELIEVE that theologians, in their attempt to talk to and about religious communities, ought to give readers some sense of their autobiographies. This can help an audience discern what leads the theologian to do the kind of theology she does. What has been the character of her faith journey? What lessons has this journey taught? What kind of faith inspires her to continue writing and rewriting, living and reliving theology in a highly secular white-and-black world paying little or no attention to what theologians are saying?[208]

207 Cf. "Women of Other Faiths": http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/womenotherfaiths/bio/delores_williams/ (accessed 10 February 2017).

208 Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenges of Womanist God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), ix.

Being a granddaughter of a former African slave-woman, Williams is quite aware of the shared history of black women in America under oppressive forces. She claims that with all her roles as a civil rights movement activist, as a wife, mother of four children, as a student of theological studies, and with a single parent status due to the death of her husband, faith, which was handed on to her through her mother and grandmother, has taught her how to value the gains, losses, stand-offs and victories in her life. The context of her life history and her formative role in the development of womanist theology, have shaped her 'theology from the margins'. Williams is a contributing editor of *Christianity and Crisis.* Her theology "critically explores the interplay of theory and method, faith and reason, race and gender, and history and culture in black theological scholarship."[209] Taking up the wilderness as a theological starting point, Williams has contributed greatly to the canon of womanist theological ethics and a female-centred tradition of African-American women based on the story of Hagar.[210] Being aware of the powerful experience black Americans had with God, Williams states that this should be used to compose responses to the question about God in different life situations.

1.2 Basic Characteristics of Delores S. Williams's Theological Method

As for many other womanists, the source for Williams's theological method is everyday experience. In her case, it is the lived experience of African-American oppression as well as oppression due to class and gender. Her method is also informed by the process of resisting oppression, in reconstructing society. The well-known work of Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*: *The Chalanges of Womanist God-Talk*, provides facts and perspectives subjected to critical and contextual reflection.

Williams is of the opinion that the Christian womanist theological method needs to be informed by at least four elements. The first element

209 "Women of Other Faiths": http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/womenotherfaiths/bio/delores_williams/ (accessed 10 February 2017).

210 Alice Walker who is a writer and activist coined the term 'womanist' in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. According to Delores Williams, womanist theology is, "a prophetic voice reminding African-American denominational churches of their mission to seek justice and voice for all their people, of which black women are the overwhelming majority in their congregation." Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness,* xiii.

is a multi-dialogical intent, which advocates and participates in dialogue and action with many diverse social, political and religious communities. The second element is the need for a liturgical intent that is relevant to thought, worship and action, and challenging to the thought, worship and action of the Church. The third element describes the didactic intent/the teaching function of theology: the teaching of new insights to Christians. The fourth element refers to the commitment both to reason and to the validity of female imagery and metaphorical language in the construction of a theological statement.[211]

1.3 The Theological Conceptualisation of Delores S. Williams

In her womanist theology, naming, exposing, resisting and overcoming violence is one of the major concerns, rooted in her unique lived experience as 'black' and a 'woman'.

> The lived experience of black women under the triple threat of race, class and gender oppression is not articulated by womanist theologians to create an attitude of victimisation but rather with the intention to name evil and oppression forces as a step in the process of resisting oppression, overcoming the cadre of challenges black women face, and articulating the unique ways women of African descent experience and articulate their encounter with God.[212]

During her life-long experience Williams has observed that black women in the USA have been invisible in both black theology and feminist theology. On the one hand, while assuming the necessity of responsible freedom for all human beings as the emphasis of black liberation theology (from the perspective of men), womanist theology concerns itself with the faith and struggle of African-American women. On the other hand, womanist theology, while identifying with the white feminists in assuming the full humanity of women, also critiques white feminist participation in the perpetuation of white supremacy, which continues to dehumanise black women.[213] Williams highlights the need for doing theology simultaneously

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211 Cf. Delores Williams, "Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reade*r, ed. Ursula King (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 84-85.

212 D. Buchanan, "Origin of Womanist Theology," in *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church*, 2008 edition.

213 Cf. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, xiv.

from the black community's and the black women's perspective – non-separatist and dialogical. "It [womanist theology] welcomes discourse with a variety of theological voices – liberation, white feminist, Mujerista, Jewish, Asian, African, classical and contemporary 'male-stream', as well as non-feminist female voices."[214]

Williams presents three areas in which womanist theology can dialogue with black liberation theology. The first area is the theological method of using or re-reading the Bible. As a response to sexism in black theology, Williams highlights the life of Hagar, where the black male Church identifies itself with Israel in Exodus as a typical model of their struggle against oppression in America. Hence, Williams suggests that in black theology, "[T]he wilderness experience is a more appropriate name than the black experience to describe African-American existence in North America."[215]

Secondly, because she takes the woman-inclusive wilderness experience into account, Williams stresses the importance of examining the ways in which Christian doctrine effects black women. In her view, "black theology's understanding of incarnation, of revelation, Jesus Christ and reconciliation holds very little promise for black women."[216]

Thirdly, highlighting that black people and the African-American denominational Churches are engaged in a process of 'revaluing value', Williams speaks about the following principles that should guide this process: "means in ethics supporting a liberation struggle and ethics supporting women's survival and quality of life struggle."[217] Therefore, in her theological analysis, Williams critically challenges the pioneers of black theology, like Martin Luther King Jr., because their vision may lead black women to "passively … accept their oppression and suffering."[218]

Williams observes that black women have been left out of black liberation theology, and have also been invisible in feminist theology despite the contribution of feminist theology to the development of womanist theology. Whilst she explains the differences and commonalities between feminist theology and womanist theology, Williams asserts that

214 Ibid., xv.
215 Ibid., 159.
216 Ibid., 169.
217 Ibid., 176.
218 Ibid., 200.

as the black communities are engaged in a terrible struggle for life and wellbeing, "all our talk about God must translate in action that can help our people live. Womanist theology is significant only if it contributes to this struggle."[219] To help begin the dialogue between the womanists and feminists, Williams suggests some possibilities in relating to three themes:

1) To be acceptably female.
2) A scope and definition of patriarchy.
3) Womanist/feminist voice in hermeneutics.

First, Willams challenges the anthropological positions of feminist theologians, and asks whether they have forgotten that in many cultures, for women to be assumed to have any humanity at all, they must be white-women. Based on this foundational thought, she questions the idea of white woman humanity as the model of all female humanity. Secondly, Williams finds that as the emphasis of most white feminists is on patriarchy, attention to the phenomenon of women oppressing other women could be ignored. Therefore, she claims, "... for patriarchy to be inclusive of black women's experience in white society, there needs to be discussion between womanists and feminists about revision of the term."[220] The reason is that, even though many white feminists speak about multi-layered oppression, the ways that they oppress black women is often not highlighted. Thirdly, Williams brings up the point that as women speak about multi-layered oppression and try to overcome this while engaging in hermeneutics, it is important to have womanist/feminist dialogue in hermeneutics. As she claims, "the womanist survival/quality of life hermeneutics means to communicate this to black Christians: liberation is an ultimate, but in the meantime survival and prosperity must be the experience of our people. God has had and continues to have a word to say about the survival and quality of life of the descendants of African female slaves."[221]

Williams claims that womanist theology has a relationship to black theology, as it also has a relationship to feminist theology. Womanist theology has emerged in tension with its two related groups: black liberationists and feminists. Hence, Williams says that recognising and honouring the differences and commonalities can lead in directions all can own.

219 Ibid., 203.
220 Ibid., 186.
221 Ibid., 196.

1.4 Delores S. Williams's Understanding of Suffering

Williams's understanding of suffering has to be discussed in the context of the experience of black women in history and literature, which are sources for womanist theology, the biblical figure of Hagar being an exemplar of black women's experience.

1.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

1.4.1.1 Suffering through the Experience of Black Women: Social-Role Surrogacy

Williams, in her work *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Chalanges of Womanist God-Talk*, uses the story of Hagar as a metaphorical narrative to explain the reality of black women in their shared history as slaves under oppression in America. While identifying the 'Hagar tradition' as a black woman's tradition, she discusses surrogacy, one of the major themes in Hagar's story of exploitation. By doing so, Williams states that surrogacy is not only a major theme in Hagar's story but also a strong reality in African-American women's history. Williams clarifies the difference between these two realities as follows: "... whereas Hagar's experience with surrogacy was primarily biological, African-American women's experience with surrogacy has been primarily associated with social-role exploitation."[222] Williams states that two kinds of surrogacy have negatively affected the lives of African-American women; (1) Coerced surrogacy, belonging to the antebellum period; and (2) Voluntary surrogacy, belonging to the postbellum period.[223] Hence, these two modes of surrogacy have their connections with black history, religion and culture.

Coerced surrogacy was a condition in which powerful social systems forced black women to function in roles that ordinarily would have been filled by someone else, for example, to be a substitute for the slave-owner's wife in nurturing roles and being forced to take the place of men in work roles. In her elaboration of coerced surrogacy, Williams articulates three areas in the antebellum – nurturing, field labour and sexuality.[224] In relation to the first area, Williams says that the southern black 'mammy' who was standing in the place of a slave-owner's wife, nurtured the entire

222 Ibid., 60.

223 Cf. Ibid., 61.

224 Cf. Ibid., 60-62.

white family. According to the pro-slavery arguments, as a house servant the mammy had complete control of the management of the white house in her role as surrogate mistress and mother, but within the Victorian ideals of womanhood. As a result, Williams says, those who argue for pro-slavery say that, "slavery could be a tool for converting some 'heathen' black women into 'civilised' models of womanhood. While challenging this mythology, she claims the reality that black mammies had to face in their old age, which was often full of suffering. She accepts that these mammies were empowered house slaves who were given considerable authority by their owners, yet they were not free. Despite of all these experiences Williams says that slave women, in their coerced roles as mammies, were often abused yet also empowered.[225]

Regarding the second area of the surrogacy role – the masculinisation of the black female – Williams speaks about the reality where black women were forced into work usually associated with male roles. The slave women coerced to perform masculine tasks very often had to face various kinds of difficulties and sometimes met with death at the hands of their owners. Therefore, Williams states, "in the consciousness of many slaves, the masculinisation of the roles of female slaves erased gender boundaries in relation to work."[226] With regard to the role of the mammy, Williams says that women who filled the masculinised roles beyond the Big House, were less respected than mammies, because the former were considered to be a lower class than the female house slaves who usually did 'women's work'.

In relation to the third area, Williams claims that more than in the areas of nurturing and field labour, coerced surrogacy in the area of sexuality was threatening to slave women's self-esteem and sense of self-worth. During the period when the Victorian ideal of true womanhood supported a consciousness that sex between white men and their wives was for the purpose of procreation rather than for pleasure, many white males turned to slave women for their sexual pleasure.

Williams's reflection on coerced surrogacy suggests firstly that the image of black women as perpetual mother figures emerged from the mammy tradition. Secondly, the tradition of masculinising black women has

225 Cf. Ibid., 65.

226 Ibid., 65.

given rise to the idea that black women are not feminine and do not desire to be so, and also that they are "comparatively insensitive to sufferings that would be unbearable to whites."[227] These kinds of images have a negative impact on black women and this devaluing of black womanhood continues to this day, says Williams.

Even after the master-slave relation was officially terminated with the end of the American Civil War, surrogacy continued under another term 'voluntary surrogacy', mainly due to poverty. Williams states that there is a difference between the previous state and the present: after the emancipation black women could exercise the choice of refusing the surrogate role.[228] This freedom of choice is, however, limited, because even black males, like their white counterparts, pressurise their wives to play their role as 'women' in the home sphere, while performing the role of motherhood. Whatever the case may be, "surrogacy has been a negative force in African-American women's lives. It has been used by both men and women of the ruling class, as well as by some black men, to keep black women in the service of other people's needs and goals."[229] Williams also shows how the African-American women have kept the issue of surrogacy alive while appropriating the biblical story of Hagar.

Williams's articulation of the situation of the African-American historical experience with surrogacy, raises serious questions about the way many Christians have been taught to imagine redemption.

1.4.1.2 Doctrine: Surrogacy and Redemption

As Jesus stands in the place of sinful humankind, Williams says, Jesus represents the ultimate surrogate figure. Consequently, she asks "whether the image of a surrogate-God has salvific power for black women or whether this image supports and reinforces the exploitation that has accompanied their experience with surrogacy. If black women accept this idea of redemption, can they not also passively accept the exploitation that surrogacy brings?"[230]

Williams presents a fundamental critique of traditional atonement theories that propound the idea that Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for

227 Ibid., 70.

228 Cf. Ibid., 61.

229 Ibid., 81.

230 Ibid., 162.

sinful humankind. However, all the traditional theories of atonement may, in Williams's opinion, not be useful for providing an acceptable response to African-American women's question about redemption and surrogacy. She argues, that "black women's salvation does not depend upon any form of surrogacy made sacred by a traditional and orthodox understanding of Jesus' life and death. Their salvation is assured by Jesus' life of resistance and by the survival strategies he used to help people survive the death of identity."[231] In her view, redemption had to do with God – through Jesus – giving humankind a new vision to see the resources for positive, abundant relational life.

1.4.1.3 The Ministerial Vision of Jesus and the Resurrection

Williams claims that Jesus' ministry of healing the human body, mind and spirit portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels provides a resource for constructing a Christian understanding of redemption that speaks meaningfully to black women. She notes that Jesus did not come to redeem 'sinful humankind' by showing them the love of God manifested by the death of God's innocent child on a cross. The Synoptic Gospels suggest that Jesus came to reveal humans 'life' "through a perfect ministerial vision of righting relations between body and spirit."[232] This vision of life that is female inclusive, gives humankind the ethical thought and practice upon which to build a positive, productive quality of life through Jesus' saving power of a lifelong healing, teaching, preaching and liberating ministry.

Williams argues that the response of the oppressive powers to this invitation of the ministerial vision of Jesus was a cruel crucifixion: evil humankind tried to kill the ministerial vision of Jesus by sending him to a horrible crucifixion. While challenging the existing theories of atonement and the doctrine of resurrection, she says, "the resurrection does not depend upon the cross for life, for the cross only represents historical evil trying to defeat good."[233] This way of understanding leads one to think of the reign of God as a metaphor of hope. Salvation is assured by Jesus himself, by his life of resistance and his survival strategies. Williams goes on to say that histories, social locations, past and present experiences shape how we understand Jesus' work on the cross. Hence, Williams sees the importance

231 Ibid., 164.

232 Ibid., 164-165.

233 Ibid., 165.

of rethinking the image of Jesus on the cross through the experience of the black women in American society.

1.4.1.4 Rethinking the Cross of Jesus Christ

Williams sees the image of Jesus on the cross primarily as the image of human sin in its most desecrated form, while understanding that God is not responsible for the death of Jesus. For Williams, Jesus does not conquer sin through death on the cross; rather he conquers sin in the wilderness by resistance, Jesus conquers sin in life but not in death.[234] While highlighting the wilderness experience of Jesus, Williams says that in the wilderness Jesus refused to allow evil forces to defile "the balanced relation between the material and spiritual, between life and death, between power and the exertion of it."[235] In her reflection on Jesus and the surrogacy experience of black women, Williams articulates the message to the black women that "God did not intend the defilement of their bodies as white men put them in the place of white women to provide sexual pleasure for white men during the slavocracy [this was rape]."[236]

For Williams, the cross is a reminder of the evil actions of humankind throughout history that destroy 'visions of righting relationships', of efforts to transform oppressive sinfulness in society. The cross is not redemptive or sacred as it represents sin. Williams does not try to forget the cross, but states that she does not need to glorify it as the traditional teachings of the Church and some liberation/liberal theologians have done till this day: "to do so [glorifying] is to glorify suffering and to render their exploitation sacred. To do so is to glorify the sin of defilement."[237] Nekeisha Alexis, commenting on the theology of Williams, says, "[F]or her [Williams], the cross reminds us of what can happen to those who practise Jesus' ministerial vision in a sin-filled world."[238] According to Williams, a cross-centred soteriology leaves black women marginal, un-liberated and deprives them of the resources they need for their survival under the oppression of patriarchs and racists. In their journey to liberation, Williams says, while

234 Cf. Ibid., 165.

235 Ibid., 166.

236 Ibid., 166.

237 Ibid., 167.

238 Nekeisha Alexis-Baker, "Renewing the Passion: Freeing the Cross for Redemption," *Vision* 8, no.2 (Fall, 2007): 45.

rejecting the glorification of suffering, black women began to name and define their own experience of oppression by using a variety of political strategies, which Williams designated as 'life-line politics'.

1.4.1.5 The Wilderness Experience and the Life-Line Politics of Black Women

Based on the biblical story in Genesis, Williams suggests that Hagar must have been afraid when she found herself in the wilderness, without protection or economic resources. Such a reality was also experienced by the surrogate mother in slavery. The story of Hagar also dramatises that God is with Hagar. She has a radical encounter with God in the midst of her suffering: Yahweh has plans for Hagar and for "her survival and the quality of life she must form and endure for several years."[239]

Firstly, God invites Hagar to speak, asking "where have you come from and where are you going?" (Gen 16:8). Secondly, God says to Hagar, "go back to your mistress ..." (Gen 16:9), which Williams understands as a right of inheritance in the house of Abraham. Finally, God gives a promise/blessing to Hagar which offers hope; hope for the survival and the possibility of future freedom. As the story continues, Hagar gives a name to her God: 'El Roi'. The significance of the name Hagar gave to God is that "this deity is not associated with Hagar's oppressors, the patriarchal family."[240] In Hagar's wilderness experience, concludes Williams, "God gave her new vision to see survival resources where she saw none before."[241]

> Both Genesis 16 and 21 narratives reveal the faith, hope and struggle with which an African slave woman worked through issues of survival, surrogacy, motherhood, rape, homelessness and economic and sexual oppression …. Hagar has 'spoken' to generation after generation of black women because her story has been validated as true by suffering black people.[242]

Williams argues that black women like Hagar in their wilderness experience of surrogacy, have not been passive in the face of the threat of destruction and death. Black women following the tradition of Hagar used political strategies in their struggle to create a new relational form of independence. Williams named these political strategies black women used

239 Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 20.

240 Ibid., 24.

241 Ibid., 32.

242 Ibid., 33.

for their survival 'life-line politics'.[243] She explains that life-line politics are religious in nature and concern women's faith, women's ritual practice, and women's thoughts about God. Black women, in their oppressive history, have used a variety of subtle or silent or dramatic resistance strategies: (1) Developing power to fight against oppression; (2) Forging relationships: women form bonds with other women and with men; (3) Distancing themselves from oppression; and (4) Raising consciousness.[244]

Williams relates that black women have petitioned courts for freedom for themselves and their children. They were accused of burning buildings, using their physical strength against their oppressor on behalf of their loved ones who were oppressed. Among different kinds of resistance strategies, one of the major strategies black women used to survive surrogacy was passing on the 'doctrine of resistance' to their children. The heart of the slave mother's doctrine of resistance was: "'fight, if you can't fight, kick, if you can't kick, then bite."[245] These teachings of slave mothers to their children, especially to their daughters have given hope to survive for a quality life, says Williams. She appreciates the model of faith and social behaviour that these women have passed down to generations of women in the community and Church. In her study of nineteenth-century women's narratives, Williams speaks about the 'exhorters' Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw and Old Elizabeth who became preachers though there was no practice of ordaining women in the mainstream institutional Church. Williams asserts that "black women have a heritage as rich as the biblical tradition that shows them how the spirit nurtured for the work of resistance."[246]

Williams highlights how black women in their worship of God developed resistance strategies to keep them alive. During their slavery, she says, women experienced that God spoke to them directly and acted on their behalf. This ancient heritage must be used in a ritualistic way to compose responses to the question who 'God-Jesus-the Spirit' are for

243 Cf. Delores Williams, "Women's oppression and Life Line Politics in Black Religious Narratives," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1, no. 2 (Fall, 1985): 68.

244 Cf. Kurt Buhring, *Conceptions of God, Freedom, and Ethics in African American and Jewish Theology* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 75.

245 Delores S. Williams, "Women's Oppression and Life Line Politics in Black Religious Narratives," 138.

246 Delores S. Williams, "Vision, Inner Voice, Apparitions, and Defiance in Nineteenth-Century Studies," *Quarterly* 21, no.1 (Spring, 1993): 89.

black Americans. Therefore, says Williams, "[T]he liberation of African-American people cannot be effected until liberated womanist worship becomes the 'order of the day' in black Christian churches."[247]

Like Hagar, who experienced God to be with her in her suffering and destitution, black women too experienced God who willed transformation in their lives. Like Hagar, black people realise that "God helped them make a way out of no way" they consider God to be involved not only in their survival struggle, but "that God also supports their struggle for a quality of life …."[248] In the view of Williams, God does not liberate Hagar from her bondage. Rather what God does is that God sustains and empowers her to survive. Therefore, for Williams the Bible is a collection of stories about survival, not necessarily liberation.

1.5 Summary

Delores Williams's multidisciplinary approach observes the dehumanisation of black African women due to their race and gender. She emphasises the need for doing theology simultaneously from the perspective of the black community and of black women. Therefore, reflection on suffering has to be understood in this particular oppressive context. This is where she finds that women are the ones who suffer the most in many societies. On the one hand, black African women were oppressed by the whites in general, on the other hand, they were again oppressed by their own community of men due to their gender difference.

Two key elements are visible in William's theology: (1) The experience of surrogacy among black women; and (2) The survival strategies or life-line politics or resistance to suffering. While rejecting the suffering and violence of 'surrogacy', she states that black women's salvation does not depend upon any form of surrogacy made sacred especially by the teachings of the Church, which says that humans are redeemed by the suffering and the death of Jesus. What she highlights is not the violent death of Jesus, but Jesus' life of resistance and his survival strategies that helped people to overcome suffering in life. For Williams, the cross of Jesus is not redemptive or sacred, yet represents the sin and

247 Delores S. Williams, "Rituals of Resistance in Womanist Worship," in *Women at Worship: Interpretations of North American Diversity*, eds. Marjorie Procter-Smith and Janet R. Walton (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 222.

248 Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 6.

evil of the world: the cross is not something to be glorified or something that gives meaning to suffering in relation to love and sacrifice. She claims that she does not want to leave black African women marginalised due to the cross-centred soteriology of Christianity, while passively accepting their oppression and suffering.

Williams suggests that Hagar, who sees God not as the liberator, as liberation theologians do, but as the One who sustains and empowers her, the oppressed woman, to survive. Williams emphasises that suffering should not to be considered as the fate or destiny in life. Therefore, struggle against suffering is essential, as the black African women struggled to overcome their suffering through resistance.

2. The Erotic Power of the Community: Rita Nakashima Brock

2.1 A Biographical Sketch of Rita Nakashima Brock

> Life is the basis for theological reflection and to write in a way that would invite people to reflect on their own lives and their own theology.... So the point of telling all this personal stuff about our personal lives was to show how the theological conclusions we had reached really were grounded in our own lives and experiences. Rita Nakashima Brock

Rita Nakashima Brock, born in 1951 in Japan, is a contemporary Protestant feminist theologian. She received her doctorate from Claremont Graduate School in Theology and Philosophy of Religion. Brock's mother was Japanese, her birthfather was a US Army veteran of Korea and her stepfather was a US Army veteran of World War II and the Vietnam War. Being aware of her father's post-traumatic stress, Brock narrates, "... my father had been my emotional companion. My mother was distant and reserved, while Roy [her father] was warm and pleasant. Vietnam stole him from me."[249] Although she is a child from a Japanese family, she had been shielded from the struggle of post-World War II.

Brock states, as is the case with Asian ways of being in the world, her story is of her families and her relationships. Because of her Japanese-Puerto Rican descent, her earliest religious experience was Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. As a result of unexpected changes in the family, she had

249 Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves U*s (Boston: Bacon Press, 2001), 65.

to move to the US when she was six years old with her mother and her white Christian stepfather. In the US, Brock was shaped by stereotypes. She recalls how the children at school occasionally called her names, like Chink or Jap, and made fun of her. She also says, "subjected to stereotypes about Asian woman, I grew up feeling both invisible and visible in relation to white men. I was the target of sexual advances based on stereotypes."[250] Brock speaks about her identity in the following terms: "my identity as an Asian Pacific American is rooted in my configuration of Asia as an irretrievably lost home."[251] And, "[M]y identity resembles my mother's eclectic meals, a fusion of ingredients annealed by the fires of growing up on three continents as a Japanese, mixed-race woman and a liberal Protestant educated in the second half of the twentieth century in US schools."[252] On account of her experience of growing up in Asia, North America and Europe, Brock struggles to understand the experiences and relationships of her life in order to harmonise their conflicts, so that she would be less of a mystery to herself.[253] She writes that Japan was a place where she felt "loved and protected, a lush, mountainous world edged by sparkling seas, in stark contrast to the dry, brown prairies of Kansas and the hostile kids who called me 'Jap'."[254] On her first return to Japan, when she was twenty-two, Brock felt that she was a stranger in her birth place, yet she says that America did not feel like home either. Brock has experienced that "there are times when my ways of thinking and perceiving cannot be easily grasped in English or categorised in terms of the Western education I have received. The intuitive impulses make me uncomfortable with and suspicious of polarisation and dualism."[255]

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250 Rita Nakashima Brock, "Cooking Without Recipes: Interstitial Integrity," in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology*, eds. Rita Nakashima Brock et al.,… (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 132.

251 Rita Nakashima Brock, "Interstitial Integrity: Reflections toward an Asian American Woman's Theology" in *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives*, ed. Roger A. Badham (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 183.

252 Rita Nakashima Brock, "Cooking Without Recipes: Interstitial Integrity," 126.

253 Cf. Ibid., 135.

254 Rita Nakashima Brock, "Interstitial Integrity: Reflections toward an Asian American Woman's Theology," 183.

255 Ibid., 184.

Brock's theological interests can also be traced back to her childhood. In her own words, "my focus on the violence done to Jesus is grounded in my childhood experiences of racism. I have concluded that the Christian theological tradition has interpreted Jesus' life in ways that reinforced trauma."[256] Distancing herself from the traditional understanding of Jesus as a singular saviour alone in his private relationship with God, she develops her theology.

2.2 Basic Characteristics of Rita Nakashima Brock's Theological Method

Brock is a woman who had to undergo various kinds of experiences in her life, since she is living in a patriarchal world, and is reading society and doing theology from the perspective of women and her own multi-layered identity. Critical enough to see some of the patriarchal bias of Western Christianity and its impact on the family in the area of socialisation, Brock tries to seek out a life-affirming theology where women's experience in society is inclusive. The basis for Brock's theology is her own personal life. While challenging the existing teachings and notions of theology, especially in patriarchal Western Christianity, Brock offers some alternatives through her studies and experience which is the most important aspect of her theology.

2.3 The Theological Conceptualisation of Rita Nakashima Brock

Brock's theological questions that seek a different theological vision are: what words tell the truth? What balms heal? What spirituality stirs the hunger for justice? When violence has fractured communities, isolated people, and broken hearts, how can life be repaired? In searching for answers to these questions for herself, Brock says that this searching is 'fundamental to living'.[257] With all her experiences of grace, which came to her in unexpected ways in the midst of her life, Brock arrived at a new theology. She reflects on how to live in resistance to violence; how to live in love and in truth without ignoring bitter realities; how to use power, how to create places of hospitality amenable to human flourishing, how to be present and how to choose life. From her childhood, Brock learns what it means to be a person of integrity. She realises that a person of integrity

256 Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 33.
257 Cf. Ibid., 8.

sustains "a system of ethical principles which measure good and evil, true and false, and inside and outside."[258]

Brock appreciates different cultures and multi-religious environments. While recognising the colonial legacy of Christianity in Asia in shaping Christian feminist scholarship, Brock considers gender and power in Asian religions and in Asian North America neglected by the dominant theology. In the spirit of radical inclusivity and of the awareness that diversity is strength, Brock speaks of constructing a theological understanding of human life attuned to the complexities of gender, race, culture, colonial history, class, and sexual orientation.

2.4 Rita Nakashima Brock's Understanding of Suffering

Being aware of a world in which one is no longer unaware of the suffering human beings can inflict on each other, Brock emphasises the importance of understanding the roots of our suffering.

2.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

2.4.1.1 Original Sin and Original Grace

Brock claims that Western Christian tradition has presented the idea that the root of our pain and suffering is sinfulness, with special emphasis on personal sinfulness. We are taught to perceive ourselves as sinners in a state of original sin. Brock describes how the story of Adam and Eve has been interpreted by theologians to mean that women are the ones who are responsible for bringing sin into the world. Speaking about the doctrines related to sin – the doctrines of sin, humanity, salvation and power – Brock claims that all these are rooted in Western thought and represent primarily values of Western culture.[259] Brock states that "our theology, as a product of Western culture, has not fully understood the human condition because it has not understood the extent to which it is involved in patriarchy [structures and practices that produce male dominance and sharp gender differences]."[260]

In the understanding of Brock, "sinfulness is aligned with blame, punishment, and guilt, and blame has usually been assigned to women

258 Rita Nakashima Brock, "Cooking without Recipes: Interstitial Integrity," 131-132.

259 Cf. Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 2.

260 Ibid., xi-xii.

as the originator of sin, or to our maternal, organic birth which must be transcended by a higher, spiritual birth."[261] She recognises patriarchy as one major factor of this damage. Therefore, it is important to understand women's experience of damage within patriarchal socialisation. Understanding sin as damage enhances responsibility and healing instead of miring us in blame and guilt:

> I am suggesting that sinfulness is neither a state that comes inevitably with birth nor something that permeates all human existence, but a symptom of the unavoidably relational nature of human existence through which we come to be damaged and damage others.[262]

For Brock, sin is a sign of broken-heartedness: how damaged we are but not how evil we are. She states that "sin is not something to **be punished**, but something to **be healed** [emphasis is mine]."[263] From this position, Brock claims that most doctrines of sin do not go deep enough to the roots and as a result, have been unable to deal with the presence of evil in patriarchal hearts. What she wants to highlight, is that Christianity should alleviate the suffering caused by patriarchal structures rather than perpetuate it.

Brock suggests to imagine human beginnings as original grace, and not original sin, for it helps to acknowledge the extensive damage done through patriarchal socialisation.[264] Since Brock perceives sin as damage produced by patriarchy, she firmly states that suffering which emerges in patriarchy should be healed within the community through the healing power of its members.

2.4.1.2 Salvation through Communal Practices

"If we cannot recover paradise on earth there is nothing to follow. None is saved alone."[265] In the view of Brock, suffering is to be understood within the reality of violence – broken-heartedness – because a suffering body requires an understanding of human destructiveness. As mentioned

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261 Ibid., 6.

262 Ibid., 7.

263 Ibid., 7.

264 Cf. Ibid., 76.

265 Rita Nakashima Brock, "Communities of the Cross: Christa and the Communal Nature of Redemption," in *Feminist Theology* 14, no. 1 (September 2005): 125.

earlier, in Brock's opinion, sin is not something to be punished, but something to be healed. This is the same as saying that suffering is not to be glorified but to be overcome. In her own words, "[T]he world of suffering is a clue to what is overcome by healing."[266]

As human beings are formed or mis-formed through social experiences, especially through patriarchal socialisation, Brock claims that broken-heartedness reveals our power to heal each other in our communities. She emphasises that salvation is a work of the healing power of connectedness: "[I]f we begin with an understanding that we are intimately connected, constituted by our relationships ontologically, that is, as a basic unavoidable principle of existence, we can understand our brokenness as a consequence of our relational existence."[267] This ontological, relational existence is our life source and our original grace, says Brock.

In speaking about the healing aspect of Jesus as a member of his community, Brock indicates how a new way of reflecting on the miracle stories of Jesus highlights the divine power of Jesus. She contends, the exorcisms and healings of Jesus have to be understood as normative statements of the sacred within the Christian community. The primary function of exorcism and healing, unlike the parables, is to fight instability and restore the structures of the human life world. Such exorcising and healing indicate the presence of erotic power in the community and the capacity of each person to remove oppressive power that creates violence and broken-heartedness.

Brock understands the suffering of Jesus as revealing the reality of broken-heartedness found in the broken-hearted people of his time. Therefore, the death of Jesus reminds us of the reality of broken-heartedness in society. As Jesus is not the only person who underwent suffering in the world, "his suffering compels us not to despair but to remember him and all others who suffer to seek erotic power by our own action."[268] The community of erotic power is the connectedness among the members of the community who live with heart.[269] Brock claims that "community itself is

266 Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart,* 73.

267 Ibid., 7.

268 Ibid., 99.

269 Cf. Ibid., 70.

the 'healing centre' of Christianity, so that the community is in a sense, our true redeemer, if the word *redeemer* would even be appropriate here."[270]

Since Brock considers violence to be always unholy, she speaks about effective resistance to violence, which comes through the community's capacities. She states that "the restoration of life is never an individual process, even for individuals."[271] Contrary to Western Christianity, Brock sees that "salvation comes from communal practices that affirm incarnation, the spirit in life and its ongoing promise of resurrection and paradise."[272] Unless we recognise the complexity of life, we cannot be saved, says Brock.

While challenging the traditional understanding of the 'all powerful' God in Christianity, Brock highlights the negative impact of placing trust in an otherworldly ideal. In her view, this way of thinking could neglect human co-creation with God and the eliding of the social analysis of the human situation.

2.4.1.3 Child Abuse and the Myth of Innocence

Through her experience of working as a volunteer staff member of a youth education project (BSUSA) from 1974 to 1988, Brock came to know personal and social racism, sexism, homophobia, abuse and family and community violence. In her youth, she herself was severely punished by her father who demanded of her to change some of her behaviour patterns. However, in spite of the pain of punishment, Brock decided to remain strong-willed, for it made her resistant to correction both physical and theological.[273] While encouraging her wilfulness to take responsibility rather than being a victim of innocence, Brock shares one of the powerful experiences of her childhood:

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270 Rita Nakashima Brock, "What is a Feminist? Strategies for Change and Transformations of Consciousness," in *Setting the Table: Women in Theological Conversation*, eds. Rita Nakashima Brock et al.,... (Saint Louis: Chalice Press, 1995), 179.

271 Rita Nakashima Brock, "The Cross of Resurrection and Communal Redemption," in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 250.

272 Ibid., 250.

273 Cf. Rita Nakashima Brock, "Ending Innocence and Nurturing Willfulness," in *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, eds. Carol J. Adams and Marie Fortune (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 71-73.

> ... we were asked to close our eyes and raise our right hands to be saved. The preacher who went on and on said, 'I am not going to stop until everyone is saved.' With my eyes closed, head bowed, hand firmly in my lap, I thought 'I am not that bad, I am not going to raise my hand, I don't need this'.[274]

Brock argues that, theologically, a patriarchal family has been and continues to be a motivation in the unquestioned acceptance of benign paternalism as the norm for divine power. The basic social structure of the patriarchal family that socialises women for domestic responsibility and men for dominance and aggression in public arena, reflects a "view of divine power that sanctions child abuse on a cosmic scale and sustains benign paternalism."[275] In speaking about the use of images, Brock asserts the need of understanding them well, because they have been so powerful. For example, based on the 'father-son' imagery in Christological doctrines, "the father allows the son to suffer the consequences of the evil created by his wayward creation. The father stands by in passive anguish as his most beloved son is killed because the father refuses to interfere, even though he has the latent power to do so. The sacrifice of this perfect son is the way to new life with god the father."[276] As she struggled to use her authority and power to listen to young people and touch their brokenness, Brock realised how little the world encouraged that way of using power. What was seen was self-sacrificing love that was upheld as the ideal and became increasingly misguided and abusive. Hence, Brock challenges 'innocence', the sense that our actions are not wilfully chosen. She says that we are doing what we do by instinct, by our very inborn nature. She considers that innocence is not a survival skill; it does not nurture and empower anyone, rather it makes for passive scapegoats. Survival skills emerge with the rejection of innocence and the capacity to make wise, willful choices.[277]

Speaking about the notion of liberation theologians that the victims of oppression have a unique lesson to teach others about oppression, Brock argues that something is missing in it:

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274 Ibid., 73.

275 Rita Nakashima Brock, "And a Little Child Will Lead Us: Christology and Child Abuse," in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, eds. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 43.

276 Ibid., 52.

277 Cf. Rita Nakashima Brock, "Ending Innocence and Nurturing Willfulness," 77.

> A great deal of energy can be generated from a morally unambiguous sense of courage against abuse and injustice. We should be clear that such energy is usually reactionary. As reactionary energy it can initiate the power of the oppressed, it can carry serious mistakes of power because it cannot admit an understanding of the ambiguities within which people live their lives.[278]

In Brock's view, abuse is wrong, not because it is abuse, but because it dehumanises the abuser and the abused. Therefore, the focus should not be on innocence, but on what is wrong with abusive behaviour.

> To know our victimisation is a necessary but not sufficient means for coming to terms with the complex and difficult relationships of power and love in which we find ourselves enmeshed. Sufficient means would include our attention to a multiplicity of voices that allow us to see where we are accountable and take responsibility and enable us to use our voices strategically for change, while avoiding doing harm.[279]

2.4.1.4 Rethinking of the Traditional Focus on Jesus' Role in Redemption

Although the satisfaction/atonement idea says that the sinner is saved, it does not say anything about the consequent saved life, therefore it separates salvation from ethics. Brock claims that this 'abstractedness' of traditional atonement motifs contains little or nothing that challenges unjust social structures. Therefore, the social dimension of sin is not addressed. In the view of Brock, "[T]he death of Jesus was a violent event. It was an event of human violence. This is something we have sought to clarify: [I]t is not enough for theology to speak about suffering. Theology must address the problem of violence."[280]

Brock, while going beyond the picture of Jesus as a hero and a liberator, claims that even though Jesus speaks for victims, who she calls the broken-hearted, he does not address the strong. According to Brock, what is important is that the power of the oppressor must be challenged by the oppressed. The death of Jesus reveals the broken-heartedness of patriarchy. Therefore, she considers the death of Jesus as neither salvific nor essential; rather it is a tragic death. In Western Christianity, the central

278 Ibid., 83.

279 Ibid., 87.

280 Rita Nakashima Brock, "We weren't Saved by a State Execution": http://thewitness.org/archive/april2002/hunt.brock.html (accessed 25 March 2015).

image of Jesus Christ on the cross as the saviour of the world communicates the message that a sanctioning of violence is at the heart of Christianity. In line with many mainline feminists, Brock understands the traditional focus on Jesus' role in redemption to be misplaced, for she sees it as reflecting "an androcentric [dominated by or emphasising masculine interest or the masculine point] preoccupation with heroes."[281]

As Brock states, violence in Christianity has been taught as divine intent: "... the Christian tradition reinforced this impulse by upholding Jesus as the son who was willing to undergo horrible violence out of love for his father (*sic*), in obedience to his father's (*sic*) will."[282] Presenting Jesus as the obedient son who accepted violence as his Father (*sic*) willed it in his (*sic*) divine plan of salvation, Brock claims how "the salvation offered by Jesus is gained by his sacrifice of himself to abuse."[283] Therefore, Brock questions why such a loving God used 'brutal sacrifice' to draw humanity closer to him (*sic*)? She brings up the notion that in the understanding of the doctrines of God and Jesus, the abuses in violent families had been made holy. Brock names this system of violence 'cosmic child abuse'.[284] Brock underlines that "violence is always unholy because it threatens not just the individual soul, but the entire social nexus of life."[285]

The most critical point behind the legacy of "cosmic child abuse" is, as Brock claims, that the theology that is built upon this way of understanding has led many people to passively accept their own suffering. As a result, human beings were not led to trust their power and capacities within, instead of turning to another as more powerful, confusing the pain with love, says Brock. In claiming love as the highest ideal, "Christian theology has misunderstood it. Love, I was convinced, was denied or lost through selflessness."[286] Therefore, pain is the risk of loving, but not the basis of love. While agreeing with the idea that love saves life, Brock states: "I believed it was possible to find the truth in Christianity, in view

281 Rita Nakashima Brock, "What is a Feminist? Strategies for Change and Transformations of Consciousness," 177.

282 Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 148.

283 Ibid., 156.

284 Cf. Ibid., 157.

285 Rita Nakashima Brock, "The Cross of Resurrection and Communal Redemption," 250.

286 Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 158.

of Jesus that bound him in love to others, that recognised the caring that inspired his commitment to resist an unjust empire and made him part of a long legacy of resistance and hope."[287]

Jesus' death was not unique, many had been tortured in the past, indeed it continues even today in the present world. Even though Western Christianity claims we are saved by the execution which reveals the grace of God, this proclamation isolates Jesus, as violence isolates its victims: "Jesus' resurrection and the continuation of his movement are not triumphs, but a glimpse of the power of survival, of the embers that survive the deluge .... The power of life is strong. Salvation is something possible."[288] Salvation requires healing love that touches the hidden wounds of violence.

Brock's concepts of 'heart' and 'erotic power' are significant characteristics of her Christology. For her, the use of the heart as the centre of all vital functions, turns patriarchy inside out: "it is a touching of heart to heart, a healing and touching that guide us toward a greater experience of the sacred in life."[289] In her understanding, erotic power is the source of energy that gives life and compels us to search for the whole of life. As Brock expresses, it is "our ability to live in its grace and to risk acting to stop the forces that crush it, is what continually creates salvific acts."[290] Her Christology is not centred on Jesus, but Jesus is included in this relationship and community as the healing centre of Christianity.

2.5 Summary

Rita Nakashima Brock's understanding of suffering is based on her cross-cultural identity, her own struggles in life and the struggles of people in her society. She finds that the teachings and doctrines of the traditional Christian Church represent primarily values of Western patriarchal culture. Not only has Christian theology been shaped by the Western patriarchal worldview but, in turn, the whole patriarchal society is also manipulated by the patriarchal teachings and the doctrines of the Church. The existing Christian theology is a product of this patriarchal dominated culture. And it has dehumanised and oppressed women throughout history to the present day. The most dangerous outcome of the teachings of the traditional

287 Ibid., 158.

288 Ibid., 250.

289 Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, xv.

290 Ibid., 108.

patriarchal Church is, notes Brock, that, when patriarchal families use patriarchal images in Western Christianity as their models in socialisation, children and women are forced to accept unquestioningly everything that flows from the male dominators as the norm for divine power.

The doctrine of original sin is, according to Brock, aligned with blame and punishment, and considers, from the beginning, human beings as sinners, especially women who were considered as the originators of sin. Rejecting this understanding of original sin, she claims that it is a symptom of human existence through which we come to be damaged and damage others. Therefore, she emphasises not to imagine human beginnings as original sin, but rather as original grace.

In the view of Brock, sin is related to the broken-heartedness of social reality. She states that Jesus reveals the reality of broken-heartedness in patriarchal society in his time. While living in a violent oppressive social structure, Jesus as a member of a community used his healing power to heal the people while affirming that suffering is not the plan of God. Jesus recognised suffering as a product of violence in society and restored life by his resistance to suffering. The suffering of the broken-hearted people in patriarchal society today, Brock says, needs to be healed within the community by the power of the members. As there is the capacity of the members of the community to heal others in their relationships, Brock values the effective resistance to violence that comes through the community's capacities.

Brock challenges liberation theologians who value the sacrificial love of people offer their lives for others. Like the liberation theologians she rejects suffering, yet, Brock challenges their focus on the victims, saying that our focus should be not on innocence, but on what is wrong with abusive behaviour. Brock's emphasis is on the responsibility of the community to use their voice for change while avoiding doing harm. People will come to know that suffering in a violent society is not the plan of God.

Brock challenges the patriarchal teachings and doctrines of traditional Western Christianity, including the doctrine of a patriarchal God, father-son imagery as well as suffering and salvation. Brock also challenges the liberation theologians for not paying attention to the domination of men over women and for not identifying these women also as 'poor'. She says

that the oppressed women in patriarchal structures are not necessarily included in this category of 'poor'. According to Brock, there is no value in suffering for any reason; suffering is to be resisted through healing.

Brock's reformulation of Christology and atonement could be considered a critique of the prevailing patriarchal and hierarchical characteristics of traditional theology. She considers the traditional satisfaction/atonement model to be a model of child abuse. Hence, Brock refuses to regard the death of Jesus as a revelation of his Father (*sic*) as it encourages human beings, especially women, to embrace their own suffering silently, in virtue of obedience.

3. Unveiling Feminicide: Nancy Pineda-Madrid

3.1 A Biographical Sketch of Nancy Pineda-Madrid

Mexican American Nancy Pineda-Madrid is a 'Latina' theologian who comes from a Catholic family background.[291] Her parents were faithful Catholics and the whole family was involved in Church ministry when she was a child. This influenced her greatly when she was growing up. In 1912, when her grandfather migrated from Juárez to El Paso, Texas, some of her relatives remained in Juárez.[292] From her childhood, her family members had a tradition of visiting their relatives in Juárez every Sunday after Mass. Her mother helped to implement programmes that taught the Juárez women how to develop a trade. Though Pineda-Madrid lived in El Paso, she had close connections with people in Juárez.

As a young woman, Pineda-Madrid moved from El Paso to Juárez where she lived as a missionary for one year. While she was there, she asked herself some important questions: "what does it mean for someone like me to believe in God?" "How is it that I can believe in God in these situations of wealth and they [people in Juárez] can believe in God in these situations

291 The term 'Latina' is used by the majority of feminist theologians of Latin American ancestry writing in the Unites States. Latina theologies emerged in reaction to the white women's movement, thought and theology, and in reaction to Latin American liberation theology.

292 Juárez a city of two million inhabitants, sits directly on the US-Mexican border alongside El Paso, Texas, and is known to have deep poverty, lack of justice, and lack of law and order.

of poverty?"[293] It was strange for her to accept that places could be so close – ten miles between Juárez and El Paso – and yet so different. One of the saddest experiences that Pineda-Madrid had come across in her lifetime was 'feminicides in Juárez.'[294] Since 1993, more than six hundred girls and women of Juárez, who were economically poor and brown-skinned, have been tortured, raped, and murdered and many are still missing. Pineda-Madrid claims that some perpetrators killed girls and women as a sport, or as a way for drug cartels to mark their territory, or to 'celebrate' successful drug runs across the border. On the one hand, the ritualised killing of girls and women reflects misogynistic entrenched pathological proclivities on the part of the perpetrators. On the other, it reflects the logic of the violent patriarchal socio-political system.[295] The women and girls were brutally killed and these killings were ignored by the social structures, because they were women; they were not valued or seen as sacred.

3.2 Basic Characteristics of Nancy Pineda-Madrid's Theological Method

Pineda-Madrid articulates her theology from the perspective of women of Latin American ancestry, a large number of them 'Chicanas'. These women mostly face situations that reinforce the opinion that as brown, and often poor people they are referred to as less than human.[296] She also shares the opinions of other Latina theologians, writing *"from within* the experience of Latinas, beginning with the questions, concerns, and issues of Latinas today."[297]

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293 Chris Cooper, "Daughters of Juárez- Daughters of Lost Trinities": http://chrisricecooper.blogspot.com/2013/05/daughters-of-juarez-daughters-of-lost.html (accessed 08 August 2014).

294 Pineda-Madrid defines 'feminicide' as the murder of women and girls founded on a gender power structure; as gender-based violence; as a systematic violence rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities; and finally as a crime against humanity.

295 Cf. Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 27.

296 The term 'Chicana' here refers to Mexican American women who possess a gender, race, and class consciousness. All Chicanas may be considered Latinas, yet only a subsection of Latinas are Chicanas.

297 Nancy Pineda-Madrid, "Latina Feminist Theology: Charting Future Discourse," in *New Feminist Christianity: Many Voices, Many Views*, eds. Mary E. Hunt and Diann L. Neu (New York: Skylight Path Publishers, 2010), 22.

The goal of Pineda-Madrid's method is to seek the liberation of Latina women, hence she draws on the Mexican American, Chicanas' experience. She defines the following characteristics of the Chicana theological method: (1) The importance of leaving behind the role of victim, that is, because liberation comes through shedding the role of victim and affirming personal agency; (2) The importance of continuing to examine the relationship between sexuality and power in order to support the full humanity of women; and (3) The importance of understanding and confronting binary systems of thought because they limit women's capacity to be in the world and to be truly who they are.[298]

3.3 The Theological Conceptualisation of Nancy Pineda-Madrid

While many feminist theologians have recounted the problems attributed to René Descartes' famous pronouncement "I think, therefore I am," Pineda-Madrid questions, "[B]ut what of the human body?"[299] Being in the situation of women in Ciudad Juárez, she realises the need to turn to questions of violence and the human body. She focuses more sharply on the material body, and writes from the standpoint of the most vulnerable and the majority of them are Latinas/os.

Pineda-Madrid affirms the significance of the inter-culturality of her theology. In appreciating the contribution of Euro-American feminist theology, Latin American Liberation theology, Latino theology and Womanist theology to Latina feminist theological reflection, Pineda-Madrid acknowledges that her theology has been shaped by all these theologies, but mainly by the Latinas' own history of struggle. Her theological imagination is situated within a long history of the Latinas' resistance to dominant political, economic, and ecclesiastical powers.[300]

3.4 Nancy Pineda-Madrid's Understanding of Suffering

Pineda-Madrid affirms that often 'Christian' reflections on suffering have advanced the idealisation of passive surrender to suffering, and that this idealisation of suffering has long plagued Latinas. In the context of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, she claims that it matters theologically how one regards suffering.

298 Cf. Ibid., 60-63.

299 Ibid., 24.

300 Cf. Ibid., 21.

> If the suffering of the feminicide's victims and their families is seen as an aberration, as the tragic lot of an unfortunate handful of victims and their families, then the desire for release from this evil, that is, for healing from God, can be described as the journey of the directly affected individuals. Moreover, if the victims are somehow to blame for the onslaught of their suffering and murder, then their suffering can be reduced to the effect of their own personal sin.[301]

Pineda-Madrid poses the questions: how do Christians continue to affirm the goodness of God in the face of feminicide? What is the relationship between this ongoing crucifixion of women and Jesus' crucifixion? Does feminicide shed new light on the Christian understanding of sin and salvation?[302]

Speaking about how Latinas interpret their suffering, but not on how they address the cause of suffering, Pineda-Madrid asserts that suffering must be understood in the "light of the redemption of all people."[303] From her point of view, individuals and communities are fully integrated as they interpret and shape each other's experience, that is, how their communities frame the experience of suffering. She speaks of the redemption of the universal community. In her analysis of suffering, she centres her attention on her community. Pineda-Madrid is well aware that the powerful role of narratives stimulates both our cognitive faculties and our creative and emotional abilities.

Pineda-Madrid draws attention to the relationship between suffering and human nature: whether suffering itself is or is not an essential component of being human.

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301 Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 29.

302 Cf. Nancy Pineda-Madrid, "Feminicide and the Reinvention of Religious Practices," in *Women, Wisdom, and Witness: Engaging Contexts in Conversation*, eds. Rosemary P. Carbine and Kathleen J. Dolphin (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 68.

303 Nancy Pineda-Madrid, "In Search of a Theology of Suffering, Latin*a*mente," in *The Ties that Bind: African American and Hispanic American/Latino/a Theology in Dialogue*, eds. Anthony B. Pinn and Benjamin Valentin (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), 187. Here in her usage, Latin*a*mente, with the '*a*', means knowing from within the distinctive experience of Latinas.

3.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

3.4.1.1 Suffering as a Dimension of Human Existence

Pineda-Madrid is convinced that when a person identifies suffering with his/her human nature, then his/her operative anthropology tends to become human-as-victim. In the view of Pineda-Madrid, when one's self-identification is 'victim', one naturally identifies oneself with one's suffering.[304] The dangerous aspect of this victimised self-identification is that victims gradually become *objects* and not *subjects* of their own lives. Hence, she claims that this is what can happen to the people who routinely experience institutionalised injustice due to their race, sex and class.

Pineda-Madrid states that the doctrine of *imago dei* – God made human beings in God's own image – invalidates such victim anthropology. The capacity God gave human beings to co-create their own lives and the world, she says, could be abdicated by this victim anthropology. Therefore, Pineda-Madrid claims that even in the context of extreme suffering, the way one chooses to interpret his/her suffering can either enhance or reduce his/her freedom. She understands suffering as a part of human existence, but not as human essence; suffering in and of itself does not enhance one's humanity, but how one chooses to interpret one's suffering has a direct impact on one's humanity.

> ... to distance suffering (particularly the suffering of the innocent) from God, from Jesus Christ, and from Christian theology renders suffering utterly insignificant, void of any positive meaning. If God suffers internally within us, then God can and does, in the midst of suffering, create a higher good out of evil. In contrast, if we think of God as fully external to the problem of evil, then the problem of evil remains, in the end, unsolvable ...if our pain and suffering are included in the eternity of God, then our suffering is significant and meaningful even when that meaning is not fully clear to us.[305]

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304 Cf. Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Response to Dianne Stewart, "Christian Doctrines of Humanity and the African Experience of Evil Suffering: Toward a Black Theological Anthropology," in *The Ties that Bind: African American and Hispanic American/Latino/a Theology in Dialogue*, eds. Anthony B. Pinn and Benjamin Valentin (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), 184-185.

305 Nancy Pineda-Madrid, "In Search of a Theology of Suffering, Latin*a*mente," 197-198.

In a world that is a satisfying place for some people and a devastating place for others, Pineda-Madrid questions how to 'read' suffering, especially the suffering of the most vulnerable in the world. She continually asks why our response to this question does matter. As she claims, far too often suffering has been dichotomised as the analysis of the individual experience of suffering separate from that of the social experience of suffering. Hence, she proposes a social suffering hermeneutic based on individual experience, to be read within the larger social matrix that defines the parameters of that individual experience.

3.4.1.2 The Social Suffering Hermeneutic

To develop a social suffering hermeneutic, Pineda-Madrid distinguishes four primary factors: (1) It highlights the praxiological nature of the experience of suffering; (2) It recognises the presence of our interests in the naming of suffering; (3) It attends to the interplay between societal problems and personal suffering; and (4) It discerns the ways in which 'core symbol systems and cultural discourses' are used to mediate suffering as a social experience.[306]

1) The Praxiological Nature of the Experience of Suffering

Pineda-Madrid claims that all human experience of suffering always reflects praxis. Therefore, how the experience of suffering is depicted and named is a vital issue. The experiences of suffering inform and transform what suffering means. Pineda-Madrid asserts that until suffering is named through words and other forms of expression, that experience remains inchoate and devoid of its power to shape lives for good or for ill. This naming of the experience of suffering is very important for the understanding and identification of what that experience means. It matters, for example, how the killings of girls and women of Juárez is named – as feminicide in the view of Pineda-Madrid – and how those women and girls understand the suffering it produces.

> How we name the suffering of feminicide is not just a question of acknowledging the enormous, multifaceted character of the suffering but instead requires a shift in how we perceive the structural, systemic roots from which it springs.[307]

306 Cf. Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 32-33.
307 Ibid., 39.

2) The Disparate Interests in the Naming of Suffering

In the view of Pineda-Madrid, there are three types of 'interests', creating contested ground in which the narratives of the suffering of feminicide's victims are shaped. They are: economic interests, state interests and interests of institutions like the Church, that influence how we understand suffering, and how we respond to suffering in the world.[308]

Firstly, in relation to the economic interests, Pineda-Madrid speaks about the situation of Third World women with a critique of the expansion of transnational capitalism and global neoliberalism, which have been serving as "objects of regulation and global surveillance."[309] Secondly, with regard to the interests of the state, she claims, "the state viewed its interest in this feminicide not in terms of protecting its female citizenry from extreme gender violence but in terms of deflecting attention from its horrible abdication of civil responsibility."[310] With regard to the third narrative, that of the Church, Pineda-Madrid discusses how the feminicide is perceived by the Church authorities: "it appears that the Christian church authorities scandalously have remained silent concerning the feminicide or have also adopted a blame-the-victim strategy."[311] The reason is that feminicide is not significant in the minds of the episcopacy in Mexico, says Pineda-Madrid.

Since various interested parties compete for attention, they put forward processes to describe suffering according to their own interpretations and these can be authorised or contested. These interests forge the "gap" between representation and responsibility and seek to maintain it.[312]

3) The Interplay between Social Problems and Personal Suffering

Pineda-Madrid states that the interplay between social problems and personal suffering is evident in public suffering or in the major social problems, yet to identify such a cluster of suffering as solely individual is a severe distortion. As an example, Pineda-Madrid narrates and explains a true story of an extremely poor young woman who was murdered on her way home after her work late at night. The managers at her work place

308 Cf. Ibid., 30-39.

309 Ibid., 30.

310 Ibid., 30.

311 Ibid., 34.

312 Cf. Ibid., 33-34.

found the other women workers, like the murdered woman who work in his firm, did not question the authority or did not complain about sudden changes in their work shifts as they depended on them for their wages.

> The underlying message is that the lives of poor, young women are of a different and lesser human nature. Within a cultural context of pervasive interlocking systems of domination, the suffering of the feminicide victims is of a lesser order of significance. It is regarded as suffering that can be more easily overlooked without much ado.[313]

What Pineda-Madrid is conveying, is that such major social problems indicate a close linkage of personal problems with societal problems. In this regard she claims that suffering is a social experience that demands our response.

4) The Cultural-Symbolic Dimension of Suffering

"Core symbol systems and cultural discourses" such as classical images, folktales and stories usually indicate suffering as a social experience. Effective cultural representations and living symbols have the capacity to mediate the construction of social and self-identity as it becomes a powerful tool in the endeavour to shape hearts and minds.[314] Conversely, sometimes, cultural-symbolic roots serve to 'legitimise' unjust suffering, making it palatable, making it appear unavoidable.

Being rooted in the context of Latinas, Pineda-Madrid states that if we need to understand the complexity of the appropriation of suffering within society, then we need to recognise the presence of a hegemonic imaginary worldview, as it is generated and sustained by prevalent stereotypes of Latinas.

> ... a dominant, social imaginary worldview is created and sustained, to a significant degree, by limited and limiting stereotypes of Latina womanhood that dehumanise Latinas as well as keep Latina suffering entrenched and seemingly legitimate. This re-contextualises Christian salvation.[315]

Paying attention to the cultural symbolic nature of the Latina context, Pineda-Madrid explains how evil is produced by the power of persuasive images and narratives and how we 'ought to' think about human brutality.

313 Ibid., 48.

314 Cf. Ibid., 35-36.

315 Ibid., 49-50.

From the perspective of Latinas, she finds that the female binary of Guadalupe-La-Malinche has often been manipulated in a way that creates 'institutionalised violence, structural evil, and horrific suffering'. Exploring the prevailing cultural representations among Latinas, Pineda-Madrid asserts that a hegemonic Mexican patriarchal worldview legitimises and idealises the suffering of women.

3.4.1.3 The Re-Contextualisation of Salvation

In *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez,* Pineda-Madrid elaborates salvation by highlighting four particular questions: (1) What is the relationship between salvation and ethics?; (2) What is the relationship between salvation and female humanity?; (3) What is the relationship between salvation and history?; and (4) What is the relationship between salvation and our image of God?[316]

1) The Relationship between Salvation and Ethics

In her awareness of the portrayal of Jesus as the saviour in Christian soteriology, Pineda-Madrid seeks explanations for why we need salvation, how we are saved, and what the nature of salvation is and what it means.

> If the salvation story is told in a way that frames Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as a legal transaction that occurred 'once and for all' and by which sinners' debts are 'fully paid', then such a story creates a separation between this 'transaction' (salvation) and the call to live a Christian life (ethics).[317]

Pineda-Madrid challenges the argument of Anselm who claimed the brutal death of Jesus, gratuitously offered, satisfying the requirement of divine justice. She questions how this abstract theory tends to narrow the ethical demand placed on believers in their day-to-day lives. The other aspect of this theory, Pineda-Madrid says, is that, since Anselm reduced the significance of the life of Jesus to his death, to follow Jesus means to be willing to suffer and die. In the view of the Anselmian satisfaction atonement theory, one's decision-making in daily life is far less important, says Pineda-Madrid.

> In the context of women who know violence as a part and parcel of daily life, any accommodation to violence must be called out and denounced as

316 Cf. Ibid., 74.

317 Ibid., 74.

> evil and, therefore, as contrary to God's will. Anselm's theory does not help us here.[318]

The separation of salvation from ethics has led Christianity to be a passive presence in the face of horrifying evil. According to Pineda-Madrid, this is what takes place in Juárez, where a dominant group of people seeks to dominate others, especially poor women, for whatever reason.

On the one hand, the theory of Anselm leads to an accommodation of violence and on the other it leads to the passive submission to violence born of an all-too-common misreading of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. In the passive submission to violence, many women are encouraged to take their 'crosses' with a mentality of divine blessing and providence. Hence, many women in Juárez identify themselves with the specific depiction of Jesus and, as a result emphasise their sense of being victims. They endure all manner of abuse and oppression. This victimisation does not lead anyone to an experience of God; instead, one will end up with a loss of self-identity or a loss of the experience of God.[319]

2) The Relationship between Salvation and Female Humanity

While emphasising the 'patriarchalising of Christology', Pineda-Madrid states that suffering has been connected with the suffering of Jesus on the cross: just as Jesus 'endured his suffering' on the cross for humanity, believers are encouraged to endure suffering. Pineda-Madrid contends that these interpretations of suffering have been used to manipulate the suffering of women, suggesting that this is the way for women to secure salvation. Unfortunately, the interpretation of Jesus on the cross has led many to believe that the suffering experienced, will lead to redemption and that the promise of resurrection calls us to bear suffering even to the point of renouncing our basic human rights. On the basis of the views of different feminist theologians, Pineda-Madrid asserts how the traditional theology of suffering and salvation accentuated/accentuates the victimisation of women, encouraging them toward domestic and familial martyrdom.[320]

Pineda-Madrid states that when the cultural, religious and political dominant forces reduce Jesus' redemptive significance to his suffering and

318 Ibid., 96.

319 Cf. Ibid., 96-97.

320 Cf. Ibid., 75.

sacrifice, then the tendency of women who are utterly oppressed in society and family is to consider suffering and sacrifice as a means of achieving redemption. They consider suffering and sacrifice as unambiguously 'good' and thus, dominant forces use the suffering of Jesus to validate the suffering of women and further, to give meaning to their lives through the idealisation of suffering and sacrifice, says Pineda-Madrid. She then suggests another aspect for the consideration of the relationship between salvation and female humanity: the dignity of female humanity.

> Unless we claim that women bear the capacity to image Christ as fully as men, the dignity of female humanity remains secondary, lesser. The subordination of female humanity, in turn, contributes to, rather than resists, a climate in which violence against women can become commonplace. Women have, then, less reason to place their hope in the power of God to save them.[321]

Pineda-Madrid states the importance of recognising women not only as *imago Dei,* but also as *imago Christi,* which means affirming that women can be called the body of Christ as their own lives assume a Christic pattern. The possibility of salvation and resurrection then becomes more real.[322]

3) The Relationship between Salvation and History

In her analysis of the relationship between salvation and history, Pineda-Madrid brings up three dimensions suggested by Walter Brueggemann, an American Protestant Old Testament scholar and theologian, which constitute the faith transformation of the people of Israel: (1) The disjunctive step of the critique of ideology – the purpose of this step is to question the dominant systems that keep some enslaved immorally and illegally, denying them freedom and justice. (2) The public processing of pain – until private pain becomes public, no social power is generated. Therefore, the Israelites expressed their pain in an intentional, social and public act. (3) The release of a new social imagination – the social practice of a 'transformed sense of reality'. In conclusion, Pineda-Madrid says, that precisely because the people of Israel experienced salvation in history through these three dimensions, this is a clue as to how it might be experienced today.

321 Ibid., 100.

322 Cf. Ibid., 100.

In the effort to secure humanity's salvation outside of history, as Anselm does, seeing it as a transaction between God and Jesus, the historical dimension of Jesus' life remains secondary, says Pineda-Madrid and clarifies how this a-historical theory of Anselm offers little help to believers in constructing an ethic for the Church. In her view, the theory of Anselm does not address the question of oppression and structural injustice.

> While sin for Anselm, is the cause of all suffering and death, he did not consider how the sin of some results in the oppression of the many … it does not provide a necessary role for the resurrection in salvation. It emphasises judgment in the condemnation of human sin, in so doing, critiquing the 'old age', which is governed by the sin. But, it remains incapable of proclaiming the coming reign of God in history and of inaugurating the 'new age' ushered in by the power of resurrection.[323]

Recognising the limitations of Anselm's theory, Pineda-Madrid suggests the need to "affirm and confirm the ways in which we anticipate eschatological healing in the here and now."[324]

4) The Relationship between Salvation and the Image of God

In the view of Pineda-Madrid, salvation is conceived in terms of the mystery of the Triune God. Therefore, limiting salvation to Christ, she says, eclipses God the creator and the Holy Spirit. For her, relatedness precedes an understanding of who God is. She speaks about authentic communion with God, with other persons and with all God's creatures.

> When the triune mystery of God plays the central role in the doctrine of salvation, then communion among persons becomes central to what salvation means, drawing all of us into ever more authentic relationships with one another.[325]

In speaking of the devastating effects regarding God as being omnipotent and depicting Christ as the great 'almighty Lord', Pineda-Madrid confirms the notion of Lisa Isherwood, "[W]here the colonial Christ has beaten men, it has crucified women. This understanding of [divine] power is not salvific."[326]

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323 Ibid., 101-102.

324 Ibid., 102.

325 Ibid., 78.

326 Lisa Isherwood, quoted by Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, 103.

In critiquing Anselm's idea of God's justice as primarily "concerned with the restoration of a divine-human hierarchy," Pineda-Madrid claims that this kind of understanding of the power of God is not a constitutive attribute of God. A relational understanding of God would encourage right relations in the whole of creation – between God and humans, among humans and between humans and the whole natural world. While assuming the relational nature of God as God's supreme characteristic, she emphasises the idea of salvation as right relationship in communion.[327]

> For those living in conditions of violence, the possibility of salvation takes on greater meaning, and the coming reign of God appears more vivid, when the doctrine of the Trinity is the leading image of God in our consideration of salvation.[328]

3.4.1.4 Responding to Social Suffering – The Practice of Resistance

In her analysis of Anselm's work, *Cur Deus Homo* Pineda-Madrid encourages rethinking what salvation means in today's context. Hence, within the context of the contemporary tragedy of the Juárez feminicide, Pineda-Madrid relates how the victimised in Juárez, individually and as a community, have created practices of resistance to dismantle the evil in their midst. And how thereby, they ensure the survival of the community. The women and girls in Juárez, through their practices of resistance, create a space for the public profession of pain, thus affirming the full humanity of girls and women in their society.

Through gathering all the details, Pineda-Madrid discovers two elements, namely: (1) Salvation is necessarily actualised in history, albeit not fully; and (2) Salvation necessarily entails making it visible in all creation.[329] She claims that, the women learn that community is the condition for the possibility of salvation through the example of women who resisted violence in Juárez.

Once the victimised achieve some relief from their experience of evil, they come to know a healing presence: God's saving presence. For Pineda-Madrid, this is the social dimension of salvation. In her view, there are three main elements highlighted in the experience of feminicide, namely; (1) Community is born and sustained by commonly-held decisive

327 Cf. Ibid., 104.

328 Ibid., 104.

329 Cf. Ibid., 129.

events that we claim as significant to us whether they date from a long-ago past or point towards an anticipated, far-off future; (2) Community is forged by a commitment to see our lives as inherently connected to each and everyone, of any age; and (3) Community comes into being through a process whereby we understand our present moment in the light of the past, with an eye towards the future and in relationship to others.[330]

Giving two possible responses to social suffering, that is, destroying the source of evil and/or using our experience creatively toward some greater purpose, Pineda-Madrid states:

> ... if our response to suffering included using our experience creatively toward some greater purpose, then we have thwarted evil in pursuit of a greater good. Through their practices of resistance, the practitioners [women in Juárez] advance this higher end. This response contributes to the ongoing work of transforming our world so that it is more just and more humane.[331]

Pineda-Madrid examines how practices of resistance affirm the primacy of community, claiming that salvation should be a communal reality because only some form of communion or community can possibly save us. This is the notion of a salvific community that should be oriented toward the widest possible communal vision and is extensively inclusive. Its orienting vision must reflect a 'unity-in-difference' and it should actively discern the work of the Holy Spirit towards a realisation of the spiritual inter-relatedness of the whole.[332]

In the view of Pineda-Madrid, "we can understand salvation only through our communion with one another, with God, and with creation. Without a love for community and without an active drive to make more visible and vital the many ways we are inter-related, salvation is impossible."[333] Therefore, she emphasises the need for interpreting salvation through a personal and individual lens, *but* if we reduce salvation to no more than this, she says, it is not Christian salvation. In addition, she asserts the importance of a social interpretation of suffering.

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330 Cf. Ibid., 129.

331 Ibid., 136.

332 Cf. Ibid., 145-146.

333 Ibid., 155.

3.5 Summary

Being aware of the horrific reality in Ciudad Juárez, Pineda-Madrid draws attention to; (1) How to understand or read suffering in society; (2) How to recognise various interests competing with one another to promote this view of suffering; (3) How to identify the interplay of powerful interests and personal experiences in an attempt to find a response to suffering. Pineda-Madrid reads the suffering of the victims through political, social, economic and ecclesiastical lenses in order to show how these kinds of lenses have created evil and manipulated suffering in their own interest.

Pineda-Madrid's way of reading the suffering of the victims examines the multi-layered need for release from suffering and the longing for salvation. Her main argument was based on a critique of the prevailing satisfaction/atonement theory of Anselm, which is focused primarily on Jesus' death and not his mission to bring about the reign of God. Recognising the limitations and negative influence of the theory, Pineda-Madrid suggests the need for focusing on community as a necessity for the realisation of salvation.

Pineda-Madrid locates her way of doing theology contextually in Ciudad Juárez where many poor women were brutally killed, while asking the question whether Christian claims of salvation can be credible. With a view to the context of the people who met with horrible suffering, she calls for re-imagining the themes of suffering and salvation. While challenging the traditional Christian theology of suffering and salvation that focuses on the individual, she uses the social hermeneutics of suffering and salvation throughout her study.

Final Reflection

The theological reflections of Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid on suffering were studied here within the framework of doing theology from the perspective of the oppressed women being emphasised. The significance of their theology lies in the emphasis on women as the most vulnerable, and their oppression and suffering as a starting point or the primary locus of their practical theological reflections. They argue that the women who are oppressed and suffer as a result of patriarchal structures, are not simply victims but agents of societal transformation by providing vision and hope through their resistance to unjust social structures as well as oppressive traditions.

The three feminist theologians, coming from different social backgrounds, not only explore the complexity of suffering of women in today's world, but they also note that suffering was and is not a simple reality, as it is interwoven into the broader spectrum of the social, religious and political spheres. They state the importance of reading and understanding suffering from a broader perspective. Their reflections on suffering reveal on the one hand, the inhumanity of women's oppression; on the other hand, how religion encourages suffering by making it imperative as a means of expiation.

From their Christian background, Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid contend that personal sin is the main Christian doctrine highlighted in traditional Christian theology, while the social dimension of sin is neglected. For them suffering afflicts not only an individual but an entire community. Therefore, the suffering of an individual woman cannot be treated in isolation but needs to be considered in relation to the wider social reality of evil in society, especially within the patriarchal and hierarchical social structures. For them, suffering is both personal and communal: suffering as a social dimension. Since sin is both personal and social, they see the need to speak of Christian soteriology on both a personal and a social level. They also uphold the idea that salvation is not something to be experienced after death, but they speak about the importance of experiencing liberation even on earth: in everyday life as well as in life after death.

In their discussion of the ideology of suffering and salvation, the three feminist theologians reject the prevailing traditional Christian theology of satisfaction/atonement because it encourages women to embrace suffering passively on the basis that Jesus was obedient to his Father (*sic*). They claim that such a theological vision never helped women to experience true salvation or to experience the reign of God.

In their observations, Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid come to understand that the death of Jesus on the cross was wrongly and brutally used to give value to the suffering of the oppressed, in this case, women. Hence, they reject the notion that the death of Jesus was the plan of God. Instead, they see the death of Jesus as a consequence of his mission of justice for the oppressed and as a result of challenging the political and religious leaders of his time. The feminist theologians feel that women in today's context undergo the same suffering

as the marginalised and oppressed in Jesus' time due to the violence in society.

Williams, Brock and Pineda-Madrid focus on the resistant resources of women within their communities. For Williams, the survival strategies of black women are life-line politics that played a major role in the struggle of black women to overcome their suffering. Brock emphasises the community as the life-giving source – the "christa community" – where the broken-hearted experience the energy among themselves. The latter is what Brock calls the 'erotic power' that is enhanced by the relationships. Pineda-Madrid, like Brock, emphasises the power of the community that could possibly save people.

In speaking of suffering, Delores Williams and Rita Nakashima Brock reject **any kind of suffering**. According to Williams, suffering should not be considered as the fate of life and therefore should be overcome through resistance. Brock, while rejecting suffering, emphasises the capacity of the members to heal the other in their relationships in community. In Pineda-Madrid's understanding, the effective resistance to violence is possible only within the community. She claims that the practices of resistance affirm the primacy of community and salvation is thus a communal reality.

Conclusion

The present chapter studied the experience of suffering in Christianity under three major headings: (1) Theological responses to the experiences of suffering as exemplified by the teaching authority of the Church; (2) A critical analysis of the experience of suffering from the perspective of the two Catholic liberation theologians and a Protestant theologian; and (3) A more critical analysis of suffering from the perspective of three Christian feminist theologians. Suffering in Christian theological thinking was explored by examining the different ways in which several theologians interpret suffering.

Critical questions regarding the existence of suffering – why is there suffering in the world? What is the cause of suffering? What is the purpose of suffering? Is suffering to be regarded as positive or negative and if it is negative what is the way to overcome it? – were discussed from different perspectives. Traditional teachings of the Church's Magisterium throughout history had untold damaging consequences for women. It was, therefore, highlighted that these teachings were challenged from time

to time in history, mainly as a consequence of the varied nature of the experience of suffering of people because of oppressive social, cultural, economic and political structures.

It became clear that 'Christian teachings' did not necessarily mean the traditional teachings of the Church, but included the different views and experiences of all Christians. The latter might differ from (or be deeper than) the teachings of the authority of the Church. Similarly, Christians are not a homogenous group of people: they differ due to their race, religious denominations, class, gender, and many other factors. The diversity of the people cannot be the reason for separating one from the other or the reason for dehumanising, marginalising or oppressing the 'other'. Hence, in the analysis of suffering in Christianity, the intention was to discuss the notion more broadly within Christian theology.

In studying the teachings of the Church on suffering, what was made clear was the realisation that suffering is a core value in Christianity and that discipleship finds its foremost expression in the willingness to endure suffering. As discussed, the traditional teachings of the Church on suffering emphasised six main areas: (1) Emphasising original sin and individual sin, and considering suffering to be a mystery; (2) Considering suffering as redemptive; (3) Teaching that there is no salvation without suffering; (4) Glorifying suffering; (5) Emphasising the suffering of Jesus as the salvific plan of God; and (6) Encouraging to take up one's cross to follow Jesus.

The teachings of the Church led many Christians to accept suffering as something good and meaningful in a Christian life. The official teachings of the Church declared that suffering in this world is temporal, leading to a reward in the next life. Therefore, the official teachings of the Church affirmed that to endure suffering as Jesus did will be rewarded in the next life. The Christian is expected to be like Jesus. This implies that suffering is understood in terms of willing obedience, self-sacrifice and surrender of oneself to the will of God, just as Jesus – the 'Suffering Servant' – did. The emphasis is on the goal of suffering, that is, the glorification of God through suffering. However, different Christians have problematised these teachings, precisely because they have been used to justify, dehumanise and marginalise many people in different societies.

The second part of the chapter dealt with two Catholic liberation theologians – Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino – and a Protestant theologian,

Jürgen Moltmann. The difference between theological abstractionism and praxis-oriented theology was underlined. The theological engagement of these theologians neither originated nor centres on an abstract principle, but rather on the demands of life, that is, from below. The context of their theologising is basically the oppressive social structure in which they work and live. They argue that the traditional teachings of the Church on suffering is parochial and needs to be revitalised in order to speak of God responsibly and related to the struggles of people. The theologians studied above emphasise the weakness of the teachings of the Church on suffering that justify suffering as redemptive. Instead, the theologians emphasise social sinfulness – unjust social structures – rather than the individual sinfulness of people. Therefore, instead of limiting their theology of liberation to meta-cosmic realities, they foreground the liberation of the socio-political reality of the present world.

Even though the two liberation theologians and the Protestant theologian challenge many abstract teachings of the Church, they brought in the notion that suffering is inevitable in the effort to bring about a just society. In their view, God took a preferential option by identifying Himself (*sic*) with the poor who suffered and that it is the poor who are agents of change, the true martyrs of society. Jon Sobrino states that crucified people are the bearers of salvation: they are chosen by God to bring justice to the nations. He also notes that the crucified people reveal that God is love. These theologians glorify the blood of martyrs shed for the sake of justice: martyrs are the sacramental signs of the active presence of God.

With regard to the theology of the crucified God, Moltmann claims that God knows and feels the pain of the sufferer, as He (*sic*) is a God who suffers with them in their struggles and pain. Saying that God also suffers, suggests that suffering is good and acceptable. The interpretation in Moltmann's theology, of the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross underlines that suffering is a self-sacrificial love, inviting the believers to self-sacrifice. For Moltmann, there is meaning for suffering in Jesus. Those who suffer are redeemed by the cross and Jesus' resurrection. In the view of the two liberation theologians, the poor who are the crucified people, still have a salvific effect in a Christian understanding of poverty.

In examining the theology of liberation theologians, one could not but question, can it be morally right to glorify the poor? Is it right to say that

suffering people might save people? Could a God who is love allow any kind of suffering? Can we justify martyrdom in the face of oppression and the violent nature of the maretyr's death? Can we accept suffering when it becomes a threat to our very existence? As discussed in the third part of the chapter, the three Christian feminist theologians – Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid –viewed suffering more critically.

The feminist theologians analyse suffering from the perspective of the oppressed (including the poor), especially from the perspective of 'poor' women as they are the most vulnerable group of people in many societies and religions. The most important aspect of their theology is that they do not consider women to be victims, but rather as the ones who challenge and resist oppressive social, cultural, religious and political structures. Being rooted in different social contexts of oppression and violence, the three feminist theologians argue that suffering is not an isolated reality. They point out that the existing social and religious structures justify suffering and encourage women to embrace it as natural. They reject the notion of justifying or glorifying suffering for any reason whatsoever. Neither do they romanticise the poor as the two liberation theologians do in their theology.

Even though the liberation theologians imply that women are included within the term 'poor', they very often do not include the experience of women in their major analysis of the political and economic structures of a society. The reason is that liberation theologians do not pay attention to the different layers in the reality of the poor: difference in situations/contexts of men and women such as violence between men and women, rapes in slums, wars and the situation of female-headed families. Showing awareness of social sinfulness as the root cause of suffering, the feminist theologians challenge the oppressive patriarchal structures that dehumanise women and oblige them to undergo various kinds of suffering due to their gender. According to the three feminist theologians, the liberation theologians are well aware of the fact that oppressive social factors dehumanise the poor in society, yet they do not adequately denounce the unjust patriarchal social structures that cause many women to suffer unjustly in many parts of the world. This is a major challenge raised by the three feminist theologians in their interpretation of suffering.

The feminist theologians, unlike the two liberation theologians and the Protestant theologian, connect the suffering with hope: hope to overcome suffering through the struggles of women.

The development of the understanding of the experience of suffering in Christianity shows how the traditional teachings on suffering have been evaluated, challenged and reshaped by different theologians, mainly because of the reality they experienced in day-to-day life.

The next effort in this study is to discuss suffering as understood and presented in Buddhist philosophical thinking. The methodology used in the present chapter will also be applied in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

THE NOTION OF SUFFERING IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING

The Buddhist goal of quenching or ending dukka is not to be falsely spiritualized into an other-worldly end, for the genuinely spiritual does not denigrate or reject the body. Nibbana can only be found right here in the middle of samsara, the whirlpool of birth and death. So when we talk about ending dukka, we mean both personal and social problems.[1]

Introduction

The foundation of the basic teachings of the 'Buddha' lies in the human experience of suffering.[2] The Buddha taught through his life experience that there is suffering in life. He also revealed the way to end suffering in order to achieve true happiness and freedom. As suffering is a common reality in life, whether one is male or female, rich or poor, high class or low class, the Buddha affirmed the equal spiritual path for all beings to end their suffering.

While paying attention to the differences and the similarities among the different Buddhist schools, the first part of the present chapter will discuss the teachings of suffering in Theravāda Buddhism, one of the major early Buddhist schools. Following the methodology adopted in the third chapter, the second part of the present chapter also presents a critical reflection on suffering in Buddhism from the perspectives of three engaged Buddhist thinkers: Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa, and Bernard Glassman.

The third part of the chapter will deal with suffering in the view of *bhikkhuṇī* Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *bhikkhuṇī* Dhammanandā and Rita Mary Gross. This section will sketch the feminist critique of suffering

1 Buddhagosa, quoted by Sallie B. King, "Conclusion: Buddhist Social Activism," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, eds. Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 415.

2 The term 'Buddha' is not a personal name; in Buddhism it is a title given to enlightened individuals. In Sanskrit and Pāli, the meaning of Buddha is 'one who has awakened'. The term 'Buddha' is derived from the root *budh*, to know or to comprehend.

in Buddhism from the experience and knowledge of the situation of the marginalised, especially women.

The main focus of the second and third parts of the chapter is to develop an understanding of suffering based on the views and ideas of the six above mentioned Buddhist thinkers because they represent different traditions, schools, geographical backgrounds, civil status, and are either ordained or lay. Following the method of the previous chapter, the reflection on suffering from the perspectives of the six Buddhist thinkers will be presented in conjuction with their biographical sketches, as there is a connection between their way of doing philosophy and their personal life experience and engagement.

I. Suffering in Theravāda Buddhist Philosophical Thinking

Introduction

Being aware of the different schools in Buddhism that came into existence after the death of the Buddha, which represent the different notions of suffering in Buddhism (my dominant religious background), and keeping in mind the Theravāda Buddhist war-widows interviewed during the research, the current chapter will deal with suffering from the perspective of Theravāda Buddhism.[3]

The first part of the present chapter will examine suffering according to Theravāda Buddhist thinking, mainly from the perspective of the

3 Theravāda Buddhism, which is also known as southern Buddhism, mainly exists in SL, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Among these, SL is the country where Buddhists have existed the longest. Theravādins use Pāli as their sacred language, a language whose origin is debated. The question is whether it was a spoken dialect (Prakrit) brought from North India or created here in SL. The earliest scriptures in Theravāda Buddhism were written in Pāli while the Sanskrit versions began to appear in the course of time. After the death of the Buddha, the teachings of the Buddha were passed down orally within the monastic tradition and the Sri Lankan monks committed them to writing at Aluvihara in SL. It consists of *Vīnaya Piṭaka* – the Basket of Monastic Discipline, the *Sutta Piṭaka* – the Basket of Discourses and the *Abhidamma Piṭaka* – the Basket of Further Teachings. Together we call them *Tipiṭaka* or the Three Baskets. Later, commentaries brought from India were translated into Sinhala and were utilised by the Indian monk Buddhagosa for writing his major commentaries. It is clearly seen that Theravāda Buddhist texts were orally transmitted, written, translated and interpreted by the Buddhist monks far away from the country of its origin, some years after the death of the Buddha.

Theravādin thinkers.[4] This part is subdivided into three sections: (1) A general understanding of suffering; (2) The Four Noble Truths; and (3) The doctrine of *kamma* and rebirth. In the present chapter, all the Buddhist terms will be rendered in the Pāli version instead of the Sanskrit version.

1. General Understanding of Suffering

In Buddhist doctrines, *anicca* or impermanence, *dukkha* or 'suffering' and *anattā* or 'No-Soul [permanent immortal]', are the three defining signs of human existence. They form the bedrock of the Buddhist view of life and form an important part of the philosophical basis of ethics in Buddhism. The Buddha taught that there could not be an unchanging reality because nothing is permanent; everything arises, passes away and this impermanence in our lives leads to the reality of suffering. In Buddhism the primary purpose of life is therefore to end suffering.[5] First and foremost, it is relevant to establish whether the Buddhist term '*dukkha*' and 'suffering' – the English translation of *dukkha* – refer to the same meaning.

Walpola Rahula Thera, the erudite Sri Lankan Buddhist monk scholar, in his critique on interpreting *dukkha* as 'suffering' and 'pain', argues that both translation and interpretation are highly unsatisfactory and mislead many to regard Buddhism as pessimistic (Buddhism is neither pessimistic nor optimistic, but realistic). The Pāli word *dukkha* in ordinary usage means: suffering, pain and sorrow. Rahula Thera suggests that in the Buddha's view, the term *dukkha* has a deeper philosophical meaning. While admitting the ordinary meaning of suffering, it also includes deeper ideas such as 'imperfection', 'impermanence', 'emptiness', 'insubstantiality'.[6] The word *duk+kha* means a bad axle (of a wheel): a bad axle makes the

4 Some non-Theravādin scholars, especially the Mahayanists interpret Theravāda Buddhism as 'hinayana' or the 'small path' as they view the Theravādins as conservative, and consider their path to enlightenment as a narrow path, an interpretation that is not accepted by the Theravāda Buddhist thinkers. To give an example, for Theravādins, Gotama, the Buddha was human, not divine and he is not personally accessible to us, but the Mahayanists' understanding is different to this.

5 Cf. Elizabeth Harris, *What Buddhists Believe* (Oxford: One World Publications, 1998), 36.

6 Cf. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Colombo: M.D. Gunasena and Co. Ltd, 1959), 16.

cart move roughly and therefore causes discomfort to the driver. *Su+kha* is a good axle. Therefore, suffering refers to the rough, bumpy, craggy movement in life. *Sukha* is smooth running. Life is impermanent and uncomfortable or irritating and therefore cannot have a permanent and unchanging substratum.

David Kalupahana asserts that what is seen as suffering belongs to three temporal periods: beginning with the past, moving towards the present and reaching out to the future for a possible solution.[7] The Buddha in his wisdom/insight found four main truths about human existence: there is suffering, there is the cause of suffering, there is cessation of suffering and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. These are the Four Noble Truths.

2. The Four Noble Truths (*Caturaiyasacca*)

> Monks, it is through not understanding, not penetrating the Four Noble Truths that I as well as you have for a long time run on and gone round the cycle of birth-and-death. What are they? By not understanding the Noble Truth of Suffering we have fared on round the cycle of birth-and-death. And by the understanding, the penetration of the same Noble Truth of Suffering, of the Origin of Suffering, of the Cessation of Suffering and of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering, the craving for becoming has been cut off, the support of becoming has been destroyed, there is no more becoming.[8]

The heart of the Buddha's teachings lies in the Four Noble Truths. All of the main teachings of the Buddha are centred on these Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths, which the Buddha discovered, are the content of the first sermon he preached to the five ascetics, his old friends. In summary the Four Noble Truths are: (1) *Dukkha* – there is suffering; (2) *Samudaya* – the origin of *dukkha*; (3) *Nirodha* – the cessation of *dukkha;* and (4) *Magga* – the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*. The first three represent the philosophy of Buddhism, while the fourth Truth reveals the ethics of Buddhism. Naradha Thera explains, "[W]hether the Buddhas arise or not these truths exist in the universe. It is the Buddha

7 Cf. David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities* (Honolulu.: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 85-88.

8 *Dīgha Nikāya* [*DN*]; II: 16, 2.2.

that revealed them to the world."[9] According to Kalupahana, these Four Noble Truths are explained as factual truths with moral relevance. In the *Rohitassa Sutta*, the Buddha claims:

> I say that without having reached the end of the world there is no making an end to suffering. It is, friend, in just this fathom-high carcass endowed with perception and mind that I make known the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way leading to the cessation of the world.[10]

In the view of Kalupahana, the Buddha's analysis of the problem of suffering took him back to the point of birth. From birth, the Buddha recognised other occurrences such as old age, sickness, and death. For the Buddha, if death were to be viewed as suffering, then birth (without which death could not take place), says Kalupahana, should be perceived in a similar way. The Buddha therefore realised that every effort should be made to lessen the suffering that human beings experience between birth and death.[11]

The discussion on the Four Noble Truths will show how the fourfold structure that the Buddha found, is parallel to the practice of doctors in his time: diagnose a disease, identify its cause, determine whether it is curable, and outline a course of treatment to cure it.

2.1 The First Noble Truth: (*Dukkha*)

The Buddha's definition of *dukkha* is:

> Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of *suffering*: birth is *suffering*, aging is *suffering*, illness is *suffering*; death is *suffering*; union with what is displeasing is *suffering*; separation from what is pleasing is *suffering*; not to get what one wants is *suffering*; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are *suffering*.[12]

The three insights of the first Noble Truth are; (1) The acknowledgement that there is suffering; (2) Suffering should be

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9 Narada, *The Buddha and His Teachings* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1988), 165.

10 *Saṃyutta Nikāya* [*SN*]; II: 26, 6. It is important to mention that in this context, the term 'world' (*loka*) implies suffering.

11 Cf. David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy,* 87.

12 *SN*; 56:11.

understood, which means really accepting the suffering; and (3) Suffering has been understood: someone actually experienced suffering.[13] This is a paradigm used by the Buddha himself as a guide to the responses of his followers. The first Noble Truth of suffering deals with the constituents of self. This concept has the following three aspects: (1) *Dukkha* as ordinary suffering; (2) *Dukkha* as produced by change; and (3) *Dukkha* as a conditioned state.

Rahula Thera states that all kinds of suffering in life – birth, old age, sickness, and death – are included as ordinary suffering and thus includes our common experiences in daily life. With regard to the suffering produced by change, he explains that nothing is permanent or everlasting as it changes sooner or later. While highlighting the third state, which is the most important one – *dukkha* as a conditioned state – Rahula Thera says that it requires an analytical explanation of what we consider to be 'beings'. He says that suffering is physical and mental. The four unavoidable physical sufferings are: birth, old age, sickness and death. Mental suffering comprises sorrow, lamentation, grief and despair. In the Buddha's journey towards enlightenment he experienced that suffering is a common aspect of all living beings; he experienced this reality in his life and in the world around him.[14]

When the Buddha proclaimed that there is suffering in life, he also said that there is happiness in life, says Rahula Thera. In line with this idea, Kalupahana notes that the Buddha was reluctant to present suffering as a universal truth. He further claims, that "'all or everything is suffering', is a statement that is conspicuously absent in the early discourses attributed to the Buddha."[15] Nyanaponika Thera states that the Buddha did not overlook this simple fact of happiness and joy in life, "but he also saw that every joy and pleasure, every happiness is transient, changing, and ephemeral, and whatever is transient and ephemeral, subject to change, is suffering."[16] Hence, it is necessary to acknowledge that according to the Buddhist

13 Cf. Sumedho, *The Four Noble Truths* (Amarawati Monastery: Amarawati Publications, 1992), 9-10.

14 Cf. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 12-17.

15 David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 86.

16 Nyanaponika, "The Way to Freedom from Suffering," trans. Amadeo Sole Leris in *The Vision of Dhamma: Buddhist Writings of Nyanaponika Thera*, ed. Bodhi, 2nd edition (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2000), 5.

understanding, happiness is real, but it is also impermanent: it does not last forever; happiness cannot stop suffering. While affirming the same idea, Peter Harvey states that Buddhism does not deny the existence of happiness in the world, but Buddhism does emphasise that all forms of happiness do not last.[17]

2.1.1 The Five Aggregates (*Pañcakkhandha*) and the Doctrine of No-Self

Rahula Thera explains that in Buddhism, a being/individual/I is viewed as a combination of ever changing physical and mental forces (*nāma* and *rūpa*). They are; (1) Aggregate of matter; (2) Aggregate of sensation; (3) Aggregate of perceptions; (4) Aggregate of mental formation; and (5) Aggregate of consciousness.[18] The first aggregate concerns 'material shape' or form (*rūpa*) and the other four factors are all mental in nature (*nāma*).

Nyanaponika Thera argues that all processes included in these Five Aggregates are impermanent and whatever is impermanent is bound up with suffering. In his view, the Five Aggregates of existence are connected with clinging, that is to say in non-Buddhist terms, 'I' and 'the world' are subjected to suffering.[19] When these mental and physical Five Aggregates are working together as a physio-psychological machine, we call it 'being', or 'I'. They are all impermanent and constantly changing. Hence, these Five Aggregates of attachment are *dukkha*. Kalupahana affirms that "[H]ere there is no judgment … that the Five Aggregates are suffering, but what is condemned is grasping (*upādāna*) the Five Aggregates as the possession of a mysterious entity, or an ego."[20]

The Buddha's understanding of 'soul/Soul'/Ego/Self was different from the existing ideas of his time. The analysis of being that results in the Five Aggregates, challenges the concept called 'I', 'soul', 'self', or 'ego', which according to Buddhism is a false belief and a mental projection. As Harvey explains, contrary to the view of Brahmanism in which Ātman (Soul) was understood as a universal Self identical with Brahman, and also contrary to the view of Jainism in which it was seen as the individual 'life principle', the Buddha argued that anything subject to change, anything

17 Cf. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 48.

18 Cf. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 19.

19 Cf. Nyanaponika, "The Way to Freedom from Suffering," 5-7.

20 David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, 87.

impermanent could not be such a self. Next he says, "[T]he teaching of phenomena as no-self is not only intended to undermine the Brahmanical or Jain concepts of self, but also much more commonly held conceptions and deep-rooted feelings of I-ness."[21] In the understanding of the Buddha, the doctrine of 'No-Soul' is the natural result of the analysis of the Five Aggregates.

Rahula Thera explains that the doctrine of *Anattā*, No-Soul or No-Self, is based on two truths: conventional truth and ultimate truth. He says that, when the terms such as 'I', 'you', and 'being', are used, they refer to a truth in conformity with conventional truth. The ultimate truth is, Rahula Thera states, that in reality there is no 'I' or 'being'. The *Dhammapada* – a collection of sayings of the Buddha – reveals that "all conditioned things are impermanent … all conditioned things are unsatisfactory … all things [*Dhamma*] are without a self."[22] Rahula Thera therefore denies all arguments propagating that there is a reflection on a 'Soul' in Buddhism, and he affirms the notion that in Theravāda Buddhist teaching there is no self either in the individual or in *dhammas*.[23]

2.2 The Second Noble Truth: (*Samudaya*)

> Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering; it is this craving, which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasure, craving for existence, craving for extermination.[24]

The second Noble Truth regards the psychological attitude of the human being towards the external objects of the senses. Nyanaponika Thera holds that craving is the origin of suffering. Craving is the creator of the world and in brief, the whole of the world is craving in visible form. He claims that craving is not extinguished when the body decays; instead, when the present body is worn out, craving seeks a new physical-mental organism. In his view, in Buddhism, there is no permanent soul, which is wandering from life to life.

In his first sermon, the Buddha preached three types of craving: (1) Craving for sensual pleasure; (2) Craving for existence or for self-

21 Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 51.

22 *Dhammapada*, 277, 278, 279.

23 Cf. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 51-63.

24 *SN*; 56, 11.

protection; and (3) Craving for non-existence or the drive to get rid of unpleasant things in life. Besides craving, there are two other important causes of *dukkha*. They are 'views' (*diṭṭhi*) – speculative viewpoints, theories or opinions, which narrow a person's whole outlook on life – and 'conceit' (*māna*) – the basic attitude of 'I am/egoism'.[25] The Buddha taught that all these cravings lead to a further rebirth.

Being aware that many claim that the most palpable and immediate cause of *dukkha* is 'thirst' or *taṇhā*, Rahula Thera states that it should not be taken as the first cause or the only cause. In his view there is no first cause possible as, according to Buddhism, everything is relative and inter-dependent. Rahula Thera asserts that even 'thirst,' *taṇhā*, depends on something else, which is sensation (*vedanā*), and the sensation arises out of something else and so on. This circle is known as Conditioned Genesis (*paticca samuppāda*).[26] It is this cause of *dukkha* that leads to repeated births in the cycle of continuity, *saṃsāra.*

According to the Buddha's analysis, all kinds of minor and major problems arise out of selfish 'thirst', therefore, from his point of view thirst is the root cause of all economic, political and social problems in the world. It is important to understand that the cause of the cessation of *dukkha* is also within and not outside *dukkha* itself. Thus, *dukkha* has within itself the nature of its own arising, and has also within itself the nature of its own cessation. The Buddha says, "[W]hatever is of the nature of arising, all that is of the nature of cessation."[27] As long as there is 'thirst', to be and to become, the cycle of continuity (*saṃsāra*) goes on and it stops once 'thirst' is cut off through wisdom, which sees reality, truth, *nirvāṇa*.

2.2.1 Dependent Origination *(Paticca Samuppāda)*

> One who sees Dependent Origination, sees the Dhamma.
> One who sees the Dhamma, sees Dependent Origination.[28]

The doctrine of the Dependent Origination or the literal translation of the term *paticca samuppāda,*[29] is strongly related to the Four Noble Truths,

25 Cf. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 53.

26 Cf. Buddhagosa, quoted by Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 29.

27 Ibid., 32.

28 *Majjhima Nikāya* [*MN*] I: 28.

29 *Paticca* means 'because of' or 'dependent upon' and *samuppāda* means 'arising 'or 'origination'.

especially to the second Truth. It is the Buddhist theory of relativity and portrays how *dukkha* comes about. This universal principle of Dependent Origination has four characteristics: (1) Objectivity – this doctrine is not a creation of the Buddha or any other person, yet the Buddha revealed it that is already present. Therefore, the doctrine is not a subjective explanation but an objective reality; (2) Necessity – effects necessarily occur when conditions are there; (3) The relation between the cause and the effect; and (4) A group of conditions coming together to make an effect.[30] In this doctrine, the process of birth and rebirth is taught by the Buddha. According to this teaching, nothing in the world is absolute; everything is conditioned, relative and inter-dependent.

The whole causal formula consists of the following twelve inter-dependent causes and effects:

1. Through ignorance are conditioned volitional actions or karma-formations (*Avijjapaccaya samkhara*).
2. Through volitional action is conditioned consciousness (*Samkharapaccaya vinnanam*).
3. Through consciousness are conditioned mental and physical phenomena (*Vinnanapaccaya namarupam*).
4. Through mental and physical phenomena are conditioned the six faculties (i.e., five physical sense-organs and mind) (*Namarupapaccaya salayatanam*).
5. Through the six faculties is conditioned (sensorial and mental) contact (*Salayatanapaccaya phasso*).
6. Through (sensorial and mental) contact is conditioned sensation (*phassapaccayavedana*).
7. Through sensation is conditioned desire, 'thirst' (*Vedanapaccaya tanha*).
8. Through desire ('thirst') is conditioned clinging (*Tanhapaccaya upadanam*).
9. Through clinging is conditioned the process of becoming (*Upadanapacaya bhavo*).
10. Through the process of becoming is conditioned birth (*Bhavapaccaya jati*).
11. Through birth are conditioned:
12. Decay, death, lamentation, pain, etc. (*Jatipaccaya jaramaranam...*).[31]

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30 Cf. Asanga Tilakarathne, "Dependent Co-Origination: The Buddhist Approach to Reality," *Dialogue* xxix (2002): 70-71.

31 Ibid., 53.

The theory portrays how life arises, exists and continues. It is also important to understand that each of these factors is conditioned as well as conditioning as they are inter-connected and inter-dependent: nothing is absolute. From Rahula Thera's perspective, it is 'thirst' (craving, *taṇhā*), which is *ponobhavika* that is re-existence and re-becoming and bound up with passionate greed *(nandirāgasahagata)*. And this 'thirst', *taṇhā*, which is considered as the cause of *dukkha*, once again depends for its arising (*samudaya*) on something else: sensation (*vedanā*). And sensation arises depending on contact (*phassa*), and so on in the circle.[32]

Since the Buddha claimed that there is no first beginning of existence, it is important to note that this theory does not attempt to investigate a first cause. Hence, the Conditioned Genesis should be considered as a circle, and not as a chain of 'beginningless' causes and effects – a reign of natural law. It speaks of conditionality, instead of first cause. This doctrine depicts life not as an identity, rather as a becoming.[33]

2.3 The Third Noble Truth: (*Nirodha*)

> Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and the cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.[34]

The third Noble Truth is that there is liberation from the continuity of *dukkha* – there is *nirvāṇa*, which is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. To eliminate *dukkha* completely, one has to eliminate the main root of *dukkha*, which is 'thirst'. The third Truth is purely a self-realisation of complete renunciation of internal attachment to the external world.[35]

Rahula Thera says that according to Buddhism, the Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the world, that everything is relative, conditioned and impermanent. There is no unchanging, everlasting, absolute substance like Self, Soul or Ātman within or without. This is the Absolute Truth. The realisation of this Truth, that is, to see things as they are without illusion or ignorance, is the extinction of craving 'thirst' and the cessation of *dukkha*, which is *nirvāṇa*.[36]

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32 Cf. Ibid., 29.

33 Cf. Piyadassa, *Dependent Origination: Paticca Samuppada* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1959), 2-3.

34 *SN*; V: 56, 11.

35 Cf. Narada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, 55.

36 Cf. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 48.

The Theravāda tradition claims *nirvāṇa* as a transcendent state initially experienced in life, and the person who attains this state is called an *arahant*. The Buddha claims the possibility for all human beings to attain an *arahant* state, one that has had all possibilities of attachment. Buddhism considers this state as a sub-state to *nirvāṇa*. The teachings of the Buddha reveal that when *arahant-s* die, final *nirvāṇa* is entered and as a result there is no further rebirth. Against this background, "an *arahant* is seen neither as annihilated at death, nor as reborn (as some kind of individual being). Beyond that, perhaps all that can be said is that there is a transcendent, timeless state beyond all suffering."[37] Theravādins accept that an *arahant* is lesser than a perfect Buddha who is also an *arahant* yet beyond *arahantship*. Only a few beings can take the longer path of attaining Buddhahood by going beyond the state of *arahant-s*. There is a path leading to the realisation of *nirvāṇa* but *nirvāṇa* is not the result of this path. The fourth Noble Truth explains the nature of the Path, which leads to the cessation of *dukkha* or the ultimate goal.

2.4 The Fourth Noble Truth: (*Magga*)

> Now this, bhikkhus, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view … right concentration.[38]

Bhikkhu Bodhi claims that there should be three requirements for a teaching that offers a true Path to the end of suffering: (1) It has to set forth a full and accurate picture of the range of suffering; (2) It must present a correct analysis of the cause of suffering; and (3) It must give the means to eradicate the cause of suffering. He argues that ignorance, which is the defilement that gives rise to all the roots of suffering, is a state of not knowing things as they are. In his view, what is needed is the knowledge of things and to see them as they are. This is wisdom and it can be cultivated through a proper Path, a so-called Eightfold Noble Path (*āriyatthaṃgikamagga*) with eight factors. The Eightfold Noble Path is the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.[39]

37 Peter Harvey, "Buddhist Visions of the Human Predicament and Its Resolution," in *Buddhism*, ed. Peter Harvey (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 87.

38 *SN*; V: 56: 11.

39 Cf. Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to End of Suffering* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2010), 5-12.

The Buddha, while avoiding the two extremes of searching for happiness through pleasure of the senses and the other through painful and difficult forms of asceticism, discovered the Middle Path (*majjhima-paṭipadā*) to end suffering through his life experience. He realised that the Middle Path was the way to enlightenment, which is also called the Noble Eightfold Path as it is composed of eight categories. Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood are the three factors that constitute the Ethical Conduct. The Ethical Conduct is built on universal love and compassion, on which the Buddha's teaching is based. Buddhism teaches that for a person to be perfect, that person should develop two main qualities, namely compassion (*Karuṇā*) and wisdom (*Paññā*). Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration are included in the Mental Discipline. The emphasis is on how to train, discipline and develop the mind through Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. The other two factors, Right Thought and Right Understanding constitute Wisdom. These eight factors exist at two levels – the ordinary level and the transcendent or noble level – and Harvey therefore, identifies these two levels as the ordinary path and the Ennobling Eightfold Path.[40]

Rahula Thera says, "[F]rom this brief account of the Path, one may see that it is a way of life to be followed, practised and developed by each individual. It is self-disciplined in body, word and mind, self-development and self-purification."[41] Knowledge of the Path, however incomplete, is therefore essential, as well as to follow it and keep to it. The Buddhist understanding is that it is the responsibility of each individual to follow the Path because no one else can do it for another.

3. The Doctrine of *Kamma* and Rebirth

Kamma and rebirth are two inseparably connected aspects of life, verified by the Buddha. The Buddha claims in *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, "[A]ction is the field, consciousness the seed, and craving the moisture which lead to the rebirth of a being."[42]

The Buddhist understanding of *kamma* is different from the pre-Buddhist view of *kamma*. The Buddha, instead of uncritically absorbing the existing principles of *kamma* and rebirth in his time, gave a causal account

40 Cf. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 68.

41 Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 49.

42 *Aṅguttara Nikāya [AN*]; I: 223.

of *kamma*, which is known as causation of *kamma* (*kamma-niyāma*). The Buddha found that the behaviour of human beings is determined by one of three factors: (1) External stimuli – physical causes; (2) Conscious motives – (*rāga*), hate (*dosa*) and confusion (*moha*) where the personal responsibility is undeniable; (3) Unconscious motives where the desire is to perpetuate life and the desire is to avoid death.[43]

Even though the literal meaning of *kamma* stands for 'action' or 'doing', in Buddhism it means only 'volitional action' but not all actions. As the definition claims that *kamma* is any kind of intentional action, it can therefore be mental, verbal or physical. Rahula Thera notes that volition may be good or bad, just as a desire may be good or bad. Accordingly, *kamma* may be good or bad, relatively. Good *kamma* (*kusala*) produces good effects, and bad *kamma* (*akusala*) produces bad effects. The theory of *kamma* is different from the so-called moral justice or reward and punishment.[44] On its basic level, *kamma* is understood as a natural law inherited in the nature of things. This is the reason for not interpreting *kamma* in Buddhism as 'reward' and 'punishment', as it is not operated by God/Gods. Harvey puts this idea into words, "karma [Sanskrit version for *kamma*] is often linked to a seed, and the two words for a karmic result, *vipāka* and *phala*, respectively mean 'ripening' and 'fruit'. An action is thus like a seed which will sooner or later, as part of a natural maturation process, result in certain fruits according to the doer of the action."[45]

The theory of *kamma* is the theory of cause and effect: the law of moral causation. In Buddhist terms, death is total non-functioning of the body, and it is claimed that all forces of life do not stop altogether with death. Therefore, the effects of volitional action may continue to manifest themselves even after death. The theory of Dependent Origination teaches that as long as there is 'thirst' to be and to become, the cycle of continuity (*saṃsāra)* goes on until it experiences *nirvāṇa*. The most important fact is that *kamm*a should not be understood *necessarily* as past actions.

The Buddhist perspective on rebirth is not a pleasant matter and, as Harvey states, the unenlightened people are part of this cycle of rebirth, whether they like it or not, whether they believe it or not. No one can

43 Cf. David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976), 47.

44 Cf. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 32.

45 Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 39-40.

stop this process, as it was not created by anyone.[46] The cycle is seen to involve not only human rebirth, but also many other forms of life in different realms: the realms of *devas* or Gods, humans, animals, *petas* or the departed and hell. Of these realms, the more fortunate realms of rebirth are those of humans and *devas*, whereas the animal and *petas* realms are lower rebirths, with the hell realm being the worst.

In Buddhism, the realm of Gods is also subject to the cycle of rebirth as others. These Gods have accumulated sufficient good *kamma* in their previous life and as a result they are fortunate to be reborn in the realm of heaven, yet they will be reborn in a lower realm when their good *kamma* diminishes. Therefore, in Buddhism, these Gods are not viewed as an ultimate goal, only as a proximate goal. In Theravāda Buddhism, as a way of interacting with Gods, they share *kammic* fruitfulness with them, as they will die when their own supply wears out. In return, the Gods will offer aid to the human beings.

According to Buddhism, there are three factors necessary for the rebirth of a human being: (1) The female ovum; (2) The male sperm; and (3) The *kamma* energy, which is sent forth by a dying individual at the moment of his/her death.[47] It is therefore clear that *kamma* is *not* the only factor for the rebirth, yet it is one of the major factors.

In explaining why there is unevenness in the world – one is endowed with riches, while the other is in utter poverty – Narada Thera says that in this world nothing happens to any person that he/she does not for some reason or other deserve. Each one is responsible for his/her own happiness or misery.[48] The reply of the Buddha to a young seeker named Subbha demonstrates the connection between cause and effect: "[A]ll living beings have actions (*kamma*) as their own, their inheritance, their congenital cause, their kinsman (*sic*), their refuge. It is *kamma* that differentiates beings into low and high states."[49]

As the doctrine affirms the notion that one's own doing returns to oneself, it also has the power to divert the cause of *kamma* to some extent, but how far one diverts it depends on oneself. Since one is neither master nor the servant of *kamma*, even the most vicious person can become the

46 Cf. Ibid., 37.

47 Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Karma and Rebirth* (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1964), 2.

48 Cf. Narada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, 513-529.

49 *MN*; III: 135.

most virtuous person by his/her own effort, because all beings are always becoming something.[50] Harvey claims that in Theravāda Tradition, in rebirth terms, a female form is seen as slightly less fortunate than a male one. It tends to involve more forms of suffering including menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and the subordinate position of women in many societies.[51] However, the Buddhist texts of the same tradition attest to many women who attained the ultimate goal, even during the time of the Buddha.

Final Reflection

The first part of the present chapter elucidated the central discovery of the Buddha's enlightenment experience, that is, suffering – how to deal with the most important aspects of human nature in the teachings of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. Like the medical doctors of his day, the Buddha diagnosed the disease, next identified the cause of the disease, furthermore he determined whether it was curable and finally he outlined a course of treatment to cure it.

As discussed so far, the Buddhist understanding was that whatever is impermanent, anything subject to change, anything not autonomous, generates suffering. In Buddhism a 'person' is constituted by Five Aggregates or *khandha-s* of related states and these impermanent five groups of grasping are suffering. None of these states are free from *dukkha* as they are rapidly changing. The fundamental three marks of all conditioned phenomena – *anicca, dukkha* and *anattā* – are impermanent and accordingly lead to suffering.

According to the teachings of the Buddha, as suffering is common to both men and women, the spiritual path to overcome suffering is also common to all Buddhist followers regardless of their gender, caste, ethnicity or any other fact. In short, the Buddha stated that there is no gender or any other classification in *dhamma*. In Theravāda Buddhism a major emphasis lies upon the possibility of attaining *nirvāṇa* for lay people who are limited in comparison with ordained people. Added to this, the high spiritual attainment of women is a debated issue. Hence, when

50 Cf. Narada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, 199-215.

51 Cf. Peter Harvey, "Buddhist Visions of the Human Predicament and Its Resolution," 70-71.

the Buddha established the religious community with four main pillars being lay women/men, and ordained women/men, his main belief was that the survival of *dhamma* depends on these four groups. The present situation in Theravāda communities presents problems due to hierarchical positions and the prevalence of a harmful belief among Buddhist monks who dominate the laity and ordained women. It is apparent that Theravāda Buddhism is often considered to harbour the most conservative attitude towards women and regards the most common role for women to be a pious lay donor.

Paying attention to suffering in Buddhism with regard to the position of the Theravāda tradition, the next step is to critically analyse suffering from the perspective of three engaged Buddhist thinkers: Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa and Bernard Glassman.

II. A Critical Analysis of Suffering from the Perspective of Three Engaged Buddhist Thinkers

Introduction

In the second part of the present chapter the understanding of suffering in the official teachings of Theravāda Buddhist philosophical thinking, will be critically analysed from the perspective of three engaged Buddhist thinkers.

Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa and Bernard Glassman reinterpret the teachings of the Buddha and apply them to the modern world. They see Buddhism not as an abstract theory, but as something to be practised for the liberation of all beings. For this reason engaged Buddhists question why there is so much suffering in the present times. Is the present reality of suffering, the result of the past experience of the individuals/bad *kamma*? Or is it the result of the violence of social, economic and religious structures? What does liberation mean in today's context?

Contemporary Buddhist thinking is deeply influenced by the social suffering in today's world, the present section will therefore deal with suffering from the perspectives of three contemporary 'engaged Buddhist thinkers': Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa and Bernard Glassman, who come from different Buddhist traditions with different ideologies.

1. The Whole Universe as Inter-Being: Thich Nhat Hanh

1.1 A Biographical Sketch of Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Zen master,[52] who is an accomplished scholar, peace activist, poet, a seeker of the way and an important figure in contemporary Buddhism.[53] He was born on October 11, 1926 in the province of Qunag Tri in Central Vietnam into a situation of political and social confusion. Vietnam was then a French colony (1887-1954), known as French Indo-China with the French controlling large sections of land and their populaces.[54] As a result, he saw during his youth how the colonial instability gave way to war and famine.

When Thich Nhat Hanh was nine years old, he was deeply moved by the peacefulness and the beauty of the image of the Buddha seated in meditation on the cover of a Buddhist magazine. He was longing to be happy and peaceful like the Buddha, to be compassionate to the whole universe. When Thich Nhat Hanh was sixteen years old, he became a novice at the Tu Hieu Pagoda in the central Vietnamese city of Hue under a Zen master. Since he was influenced by the French education system, he was critical of the educational system in the monastery. While being grateful for the preparation of a contemplative life that he had in the monastery, Thich Nhat Hanh realised that their practices did not help him to be open

52 Thich Nhat Hanh, a name he was given at the time of ordination, means 'one action'. His lay name was Nguyen Bao. 'Thich' is the title given to all Buddhist monks and nuns in Vietnam. It is a translation of the clan name Sakya and means that a monk belongs to the family of Shakyamuni Buddha. Cf. Annabel Laity, "If you Want Peace, You can Have Peace," in *Nhat Hanh: Essential Writings,* ed. Robert Ellsberg (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 1.

53 The history of Buddhism in Vietnam spans two thousand years. History reveals that Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam from SL in the first century CE. The practices in Vietnam were consistent with those of the Theravāda school, and are still influential today in the south of Vietnam. But the Zen school – a Japanese school of Mahayana Buddhism, introduced to China in the sixth century, emphasising meditation rather than ritual worship – which was brought from China – is the largest Buddhist monastic order in Vietnam today.

54 Vietnamese were under Chinese control from 938 BCE to 111 BCE. Having suffered almost a thousand years of Chinese occupation, they were colonised by the French, who replaced the Confucian system with the western system.

to the reality of the Vietnamese people, who were suffering terribly due to the war during that period.[55]

> As a young monk at the Buddhist institute in Vietnam in the 1940s, I had a deep aspiration to put into action the beautiful teachings of the Buddha. I had become a monk because of my ideals of service and compassion, but I was deeply disappointed that I had not found the opportunity to express those ideals in the monastic life as we lived it then.[56]

Thich Nhat Hanh feels that it is not enough for Buddhists to study the Buddhist texts, but that it is also important to participate in the experience of the suffering of people, especially in the specific form of suffering of their own time. This conviction made him think in a way that was radical for Buddhists of his time.

'Engaged Buddhism' is a term that is used in connection with Nhat Hanh because of his choice to remain a monk and to practise the teachings of the Buddha. In Vietnam, he founded the School of Youth for Service, *The Little Peace Corps*, with the intention of rebuilding the villages that were destroyed during the war. Thich Nhat Hanh also took the initiative to establish a new branch of the Lam Te School, known as the 'Order of Interbeing'. The aim of his social engagement was to reduce the suffering of the beings. Belonging to the Mahayana tradition, he realises the need for practising the nature of the *bodhisattva* in the teaching of impermanence and the inter-connectedness of everything in reality.

The year 1966 was a crucial juncture in Thich Nhat Hanh's life. While developing a vision of an alternative society, he became an enemy of both the communists and the American-backed government in South Vietnam. He was exiled from his native soil for forty years, until he was permitted to enter his own country in 2005. During his exile, Thich Nhat Hanh moved to Paris and eventually started the Buddhist training monastery in France.

The conditions in Vietnam strongly affected the development of many Buddhist theories of Nhat Hanh, which have spread throughout the world in the last few decades. In the context of the brutal war where people

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55 In Vietnam, monks have a history of being directly involved with governmental matters, mostly due to their literacy.

56 Nhat Hanh, *Creating True Peace: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community, and the World* (New York: Atria Books, 2004), 8-9.

were displaced, women were raped, houses were burnt and lands were destroyed, Nhat Hanh had a vision of a revitalised Buddhism. He wanted to implement this by making Buddhism relevant to the people who suffered during and in the aftermath of the war. His training as a Zen master, which emphasises mindfulness, has a great impact on his vision of practising Buddhism in daily life.

1.2 Basic Characteristics of Thich Nhat Hanh's Philosophical Method

Such terms as 'inter-connectedness', 'inter-being', 'mindfulness', and 'insight' appear frequently in Nhat Hanh's writings. These essential aspects of his philosophy have a great impact on his philosophical method of engaged Buddhism, which is basically intertwined with the resources of Buddhist non-dualism.

In the view of Nhat Hanh, Buddhism is practical. He states that Buddhism is not only for intellectual development, but is mainly to be practised. This realisation is frequently seen in his writings as he highlights how to practise Buddhism through mindfulness. This manner of understanding Buddhism helps him to practise his Buddhism in contemporary society. He understands the whole universe as 'one' – inter-being – his method of philosophy is therefore non-dualistic, inclusive and non-violent. As a result, all his teachings are based on the *bodhisattva* reflection on true love.

1.3 The Philosophical Conceptualisation of Thich Nhat Hanh

> Buddhism does not mean that we should sacrifice people's lives in order to preserve the Buddhist hierarchy, the Pagodas, the monasteries, the scriptures, the rituals, and the tradition. When human lives are preserved and when human dignity and freedom are motivated toward peace and loving kindness, Buddhism can again be reborn in the hearts of men and women.[57]

The form of Zen Buddhism that Nhat Hanh practises lies on the premise that all sensation, perception, thought or knowledge is manifested on the basis of reality, which is called *alayavijnana*. In its non-conceptualised nature, it is the 'wisdom of the great perfect mirror' – non-identity and inter-

57 Nhat Hanh, quoted by Sulak Sivaraksa, "Buddhism in a World of Change," in *Engaged Buddhist Reader: Ten Years of Engaged Buddhist Publishing*, ed. Arnold Kotler (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1996), 76.

dependence.[58] He recognises two dimensions of reality, namely a historical dimension and an ultimate dimension. These two realities are important as things are appearing in a historical dimension and the ultimate dimension reveals how things really are. Based on this notion, Nhat Hanh develops his philosophy to enlighten the people to find the right balance between these two dimensions. While in the historic dimension the world is seen as a place of beings who are suffering, the ultimate dimension reveals that there is no life, no death, no self and no suffering. Nhat Hanh, reflecting on the teachings of the Buddha, recognises reality as one: non-duality and inter-being.

1.4 Thich Nhat Hanh's Understanding of Suffering

Nhat Hanh does not separate 'Buddhism' from 'engaged Buddhism', because for him Buddhism is engaged Buddhism. Hence, in the view of Nhat Hanh, suffering cannot be separated from the basic tenets of engaged Buddhism – the Four Noble Truths, the vow of the *Bodhisattva*, 'inter-being', and compassion.

1.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

1.4.1.1 The General Understanding of the Four Noble Truths

Nhat Hanh claims that in the view that all objects of perception are suffering, there is no point in celebrating joy; joy is an illusion and suffering is real. Referring to the many practitioners of the Buddha who repeat the formula, "[T]his is suffering. Life is suffering, *everything* is suffering," he says that repeating these kinds of phrases "might help you notice when you are about to become attached to something, but it cannot help you understand the true nature of suffering or reveal the path shown to us by the Buddha."[59]

Nhat Hanh claims that it is wrong to put suffering on the same level as impermanence and non-self. For him, even though impermanence and non-self are universal, suffering is not. He asserts that "[T]he Buddha taught impermanence and no-self to help us not to be caught in signs."[60]

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58 Cf. Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974), 120-121.

59 Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), 20.

60 Ibid., 22.

Nhat Hanh affirms that even though the Buddha said that craving was the cause of suffering, he did not say that craving was first on the list of afflictions. There can be other afflictions such as anger, suspicion and arrogance, which can also cause suffering. Therefore, "we need to say, '[T]he basis for this suffering is such and such an affliction', and then call it by its true name …. If we touch the truth of suffering with our mindfulness, we will be able to recognise and identify our specific suffering, its specific causes, and the way to remove those causes and end our suffering."[61]

Nhat Hanh argues that the Buddha did not teach only the truth of suffering, but the Buddha also taught how to be happy with things as they are. His suggestion is not to think that everything is suffering and to affirm the need of touching the truth of suffering with mindfulness. Thich Nhat Hanh declares, "I think that we need a 'policy' for dealing with our suffering. We do not want to condone it, but we need to find a way to make use of our suffering, for our good and for the good of others …. We need to use the suffering of the twentieth century as compost, so that together we can create flowers for the twenty-first century."[62]

Based on the *Sūtra* on Turning the Wheel of the *dhamma*, Nhat Hanh highlights the need to practise the twelve turnings of the wheel in order to understand the Four Noble Truths experientially, not just intellectually, as this is the way of touching our suffering. A summary of the Twelve Turnings of the Wheel is set out hereafter in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Twelve Turnings of the Wheel

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS	**TWELVE TURNINGS**
Suffering	Recognition: This is suffering. Encouragement: Suffering should be understood. Realisation: Suffering is understood.
Arising of Suffering	Recognition: There is an ignoble way that has led to suffering. Encouragement: That ignoble way should be understood. Realisation: That ignoble way is understood.

61 Ibid., 23.

62 Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life* [book online]: http://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/Thich%20Nhat%20Hanh%20-%20Peace%20Is%20Every%20Step.pdf (London: Rider, 1991), 155, (accessed 19 April 2015).

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS	TWELVE TURNINGS
Cessation of suffering (Wellbeing)	Recognition: Wellbeing is possible. Encouragement: Wellbeing should be obtained. Realisation: Wellbeing is obtained.
How wellbeing arises	Recognition: There is a noble path that leads to wellbeing. Encouragement: This noble path has to be lived. Realisation: This noble path is being lived.[63]

1) The First Noble Truth: Suffering

First Nhat Hanh says that recognising suffering is vital, as our suffering is a part of who we are. Therefore, instead of running away from our suffering, it is necessary to embrace it and treat it with kindness and non-violence. Secondly, after recognising our suffering, Nhat Hanh mentions the need to take time to look deeper in order to understand the cause/s of suffering; this is encouragement. The third turning of the wheel is called realisation: naming the suffering by its specific name with all its characteristics. This brings happiness.

2) The Second Noble Truth: Arising of Suffering

The first stage of the second Noble Truth is to recognise the tendency to perpetuate suffering. Nhat Hanh notes four things that can lead to happiness or suffering: edible food, sense impression, intention, and consciousness. In the second stage real happiness is possible and mindfulness is the energy that can help us to put an end to the causes of our suffering. The final stage is actually to control the four things that create suffering. For this, Nhat Hanh states, it is not correct to think that to end suffering we have to stop everything, but what is needed is to learn how to do things with mindful training, creating nothing that could cause suffering within ourselves or in others.

3) The Third Noble Truth: Realising Wellbeing

According to Nhat Hanh, even though there is happiness within them, most people are not aware of their own happiness, joy and strength. Therefore, the first stage is the recognition of the possibility of the absence of suffering and the presence of happiness: wellbeing is then possible. The

63 Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching,* 25.

next step is to encourage finding peace and joy. Nhat Hanh says that as the Buddha faced his suffering directly, it is essential to face suffering and grow in happiness. This is the way to learn how to experience liberation through suffering. As he says, when one touches suffering and faces it directly, then joy will become deeper. However, Nhat Hanh states that it is essential to understand that both suffering and joy are impermanent, and they are not two, because true happiness is not fragile.

4) The Fourth Noble Truth: The Way out of Suffering

In the view of Nhat Hanh, a person recognises in the first stage that the Eightfold Path is the Way to overcome suffering. The second stage encourages practising the path through true learning and practice: practice should lead to concern for real suffering. This helps to change one's behaviour and bring suffering to an end. The third stage is the realisation that one practises this path.

Nhat Hanh reframes the Four Noble Truths. He states that instead of saying 'cessation', in the third Noble Truth, it is possible to claim 'wellbeing'. In his view, the fourth Noble Truth can be considered as the Noble Eightfold Path that leads to wellbeing. He also argues that instead of calling the second Noble Truth 'the origin of suffering', it is practical to say that there is an ignoble Eightfold Path that leads to suffering – the 'path of eight wrong practices'. Based on these views, Nhat Hanh would like to re-number the Four Noble Truths as follows for the benefit of the people of the present time;

(1) Wellbeing (traditionally number three, 'cessation of suffering');
(2) Noble Eightfold Path that leads to wellbeing (traditionally number four);
(3) Suffering (traditionally number one);
(4) Ignoble Eightfold Path that leads to suffering (traditionally number two, 'arising of suffering').[64]

In the book *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, Nhat Hanh concludes his views on the Four Noble Truths with these significant words:

> Once we know what is feeding our suffering, we try to cease ingesting that nutriment … we do this by practising Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, remembering that Right Speech is also listening deeply. To practise these three aspects, we take the Mindfulness Training as our guide. Practising according to the Mindfulness Trainings, we

64 Cf. Ibid., 46.

> see that when we speak, act, or earn our living, we do it with Right Mindfulness …. Once Right Mindfulness is practised along with Right Diligence, Right Concentration will follow easily and give rise to insight or Right View. In fact it is not possible to practise one element of the Noble Eightfold Path without practising all seven other elements. This is the nature of inter-being, and it is true for all of the teachings offered by the Buddha.[65]

1.4.1.2 Revision of the Twelve Links of Inter-Dependent Co-Arising

In Buddhist teachings, all of reality is deeply inter-connected; nothing exists in separation. It is correct to say that everything is caused and conditioned by everything. Hence, it is worthwhile to discuss the fundamental inter-dependency of reality through the revision of 'Inter-Dependent Co-Arising' (*Paticca Samuppāda*).

As discussed in the first part of the chapter, Inter-Dependent Co-Arising is an important teaching on which all teachings of the Buddha are based. Nhat Hanh revises the doctrine while analysing the Twelve Links of Inter-Dependent Co-Arising from two aspects: (1) Co-arising conditioned by a deluded mind; and (2) Co-arising conditioned by a true mind. Nhat Hanh states that volitional action has to be understood in two ways, namely, to live in order to experience pleasure for oneself alone or to oppress others, and to be present in order to help.[66] In his view, cause and effect co-arise, and everything is a result of multiple causes and conditions. He affirms the notion that one cause is not enough to bring about an effect and as some scholars argue, the idea of first or only cause cannot be applied. For this reason, it is not always correct to consider ignorance as a kind of first cause. According to Nhat Hanh, cause and effect 'inter-are': a cause must at the same time be an effect and vice versa.

Nhat Hanh says that the 'Twelve Links' have been misunderstood in many ways.[67] According to him there are not exactly Twelve Links as the

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65 Ibid., 119.

66 Cf. Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching,* 225.

67 After the Buddha passed away, different schools of Buddhism interpreted and elaborated on Inter-dependent Co-Arising more analytically. Nhat Hanh says that the twelve links are misunderstood in many ways. For instance, some use the teaching to explain why there is birth and death. But most important is, according to Nhat Hanh, to see the teachings of the Buddha as support and guide to practise.

different Buddhist schools teach a different number of links, yet what is important is that each link in the chain of Inter-Dependent Co-Arising is both a cause and effect of all other links. Therefore, all links inter-are. The correct way to understand Inter-Dependent Co-Arising is not to imagine that there is a line going from ignorance to old age and death, says Nhat Hanh.

Nhat Hanh challenges two theories based on the Twelve Links, which hold that ignorance and volitional actions belong to the past; birth and old age and death belong to the future; and all the other links belong to the present. Nhat Hanh, accepting the idea that ignorance and volitional actions existed before we were born, argues that they also exist in the present and also include the links of the future.

Suggesting a different way of looking at the Twelve Links, Nhat Hanh encourages viewing the positive side of the Twelve Links. He states that there is not only ignorance in us, there is also wisdom in us and as there is not only ignorance in the Twelve Links there is also the seed of awakened wisdom in them.

Based on the teachings of the Buddha, Nhat Hanh states that the absence of ignorance gives rise to clear understanding and when there is clear understanding, there is a desire to act with love and compassion. This is the 'Great Aspiration'. Just as the volitional actions condition consciousness, the Great Aspiration conditions wisdom. This positive side of volitional action is "the motivating energy called the Great Aspiration that propels us toward the beautiful and the wholesome, rather than toward the hell realms … when our ignorance has been transformed, what we have been calling consciousness becomes wisdom."[68] Nhat Hanh says that everybody is a collection of Five Aggregate-s and the mental component. This mind/body has the function to bring about love and happiness: the transformation of the body. When the six sense organs are in contact with sense objects, under the condition of true mind, the contacts will be clear and calm. Then contact becomes mindful of contact and feelings become mindful of feelings.

In the point of view of Nhat Hanh, the whole world has been formed based on co-arising conditioned by the deluded mind. This is the reason for suffering in the world. When conditions are based on true mind, Nhat

68 Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching,* 225.

Hanh says, they transform reality into a wondrous nature, which means that everything depends on our mind. To transform the suffering world into a paradise, we only need to change the mind: "[I]n early Buddhism, we speak of Inter-dependent Co-Arising. In later Buddhism, we use the words inter-being and inter-penetration. The terminology is different, but the meaning is the same."[69]

1.4.1.3 The Principle of Inter-Being[70]

Nhat Hanh speaks about two kinds of truth: historical truth and conventional truth. In the historical dimension people see birth and death, you and I, as two different things; in the historical dimension, we see things separately. To some extent, he says, it is true because it reflects conventional truth. Nhat Hanh also says that when people see deeper, they see differently, they see the ultimate truth. In the ultimate dimension, people see things inter-are, says Nhat Hanh. For example, the flower is not outside the cloud, the father is not outside the son, but we see that the father is in the son. This is what he calls 'inter-penetration'. Nhat Hanh says that people realise the inter-dependent nature of everything within deeper consciousness. This is the principle of inter-being: 'this is that' and 'that is this'.[71] He explains that even though in the historical dimension people see separate things, in the ultimate dimension they cannot compare things, because nothing is superior or inferior to the other and they are not even equal.[72]

Nhat Hanh says that everything has to be inter-being. No one can just be by himself/herself, as he/she has to inter-be with every other thing: inter-being is conducive to the ultimate truth, it is connected with emptiness. Inter-being means that we cannot be separated and therefore is a kind of insight. The significance of it is that it frees us from the notion of

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69 Ibid., 225.

70 Nhat Hanh says that "Interbeing is a word that is not in the dictionary yet, but if we combine the prefix 'inter-with' the verb 'to be', we have a new verb, 'inter-be'". Nhat Hanh, *The Pocket Thich Nhat Hanh*, ed. Melvin McLeod (Boston: Shambala Publications, 2012), 55.

71 Cf. Nhat Hanh, *The Sun My Heart: Reflections on Mindfulness, Concentrations, and Insight* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1988), 68.

72 Cf. Nhat Hanh, "I see You in Me and Me in You: Interbeing with Thich Nhat Hanh": http://tnhaudio.org/tag/interbeing/ (accessed 19 April 2015).

being and non-being. Furthermore, our true nature is the nature of no birth and no death. This is the essence of Buddhism:

> The affluent society and the deprived society inter-are. The wealth of one society is made of the poverty of the other. This is like this, because that is like that. Wealth is made of non-wealth elements, and poverty is made by non-poverty elements.[73]

Since all are inter-being, the suffering of one cannot be separated from the other. Nhat Hanh claims that only by seeing with the eyes of inter-being can someone be freed from his/her suffering. Only then will he/she understand that he/she is bearing the burden of the whole world. By looking deeply into ourselves he says, we see the other, and we will share their pain and the pain of the whole world.[74]

> Continue practising until you see yourself in the most cruel and inhumane political leader, in the most devastatingly tortured prisoner, in the wealthiest man, and in the child starving, all skin and bones ….[75]

1.4.1.4 The Practice of Mindfulness

Nhat Hanh suggests that instead of trying to prove that everything is suffering, what is essential is touching the truth of suffering with our mindfulness, which is the way to recognise our specific suffering, its causes and the way to remove those causes in order to end our suffering.[76] He affirms that instead of running away from suffering, it is necessary to cultivate the practices of stopping, mindful breathing and deep concentration. When we know how to suffer he says, then we suffer less.

Nhat Hanh asserts that "our feeling is not separate from us or caused merely by something outside us; our feeling *is* us, and for the moment we *are* that feeling."[77] He presents five steps to transform feelings: (1) Recognise each feeling as it arises; (2) Become one with the feeling; (3) Calm the feeling; (4) Release the feeling, to let it go; and (5) Look deeply into its causes. In this process the realisation of the causes and nature of

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73 Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step,* 114.

74 Cf. Ibid., 117.

75 Nhat Hanh, *The Sun My Heart,* 120.

76 Cf. Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching,* 23.

77 Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step,* 69.

feelings, leads us to transform ourselves.[78] Mindfulness, which is based on the principle of non-duality, is the foundation of happiness. For Nhat Hanh, happiness is not an individual matter, because if someone is not happy, others will not be happy and vice versa.

According to Nhat Hanh, mindfulness is the key to making suffering useful: "[O]ur suffering is holy if we embrace it and look deeply into it. If we don't, it isn't holy at all."[79] As the mindful person knows how to transform his/her suffering into true happiness, Nhat Hanh claims, he/she is capable of helping others with his/her compassionate heart. Therefore, to be mindful, Nhat Hanh says, it is important to frequently practise mindfulness in our daily lives. In order to change the whole universe, each one must learn how to handle one's own suffering. Since all are inter-dependent, when one becomes mindful, not only his/her life begins to change, but the whole.

> When I was in Vietnam, so many of our villages were being bombed. Along with my monastic brothers and sisters, I had to decide what to do. Should we continue to practise in our monasteries, or should we leave the meditation halls in order to help the people who were suffering under the bombs? After careful reflection, we decided to do both – to go out and help people and to do so in mindfulness. We called it engaged Buddhism. Mindfulness must be engaged.[80]

1.4.1.5 The Five Mindfulness Trainings: Reinterpretation of the Five Precepts

The Mindfulness Survival Kit: Five Essential Practices, written by Nhat Hanh, contains a modern, updated, and secular version of the Buddha's teaching of the Five Precepts. They are: (1) not killing or causing harm to other living beings; (2) not taking the not-given; (3) avoiding sexual misconduct; (4) avoiding false speech; and (5) abstaining from drink and drugs that cloud the mind. Nhat Hanh says that it is essential to revise them from time to time as the world changes, to transform them in such a way that when Buddhists recite them they can see the practice of concentration and insight in them. These Five Precepts are called training because

78 Cf. Ibid., 70-74.

79 Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching,* 9.

80 Cf. Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step,* 111.

"they are something done perfectly all the time. They are there to remind us of our aspirations and our commitment."[81] According to Nhat Hanh, these five mindfulness trainings are a way to practise the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path in daily life. These trainings are not commandments or rules given by any powerful Being, yet they are "ethical guidelines that reflect our own experience and insight."[82] The most important fact is that in Nhat Hanh's view, even non-Buddhists could practise these revised five mindfulness trainings as they give an impression of how to cultivate mindfulness in their lives.

The first mindfulness training is reverence for life. Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, Nhat Hanh reinterprets the first Precept while emphasising the importance of cultivating the insight, inter-being and compassion to protect all beings in the universe. He states that openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment are essential elements in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in the world. The second mindfulness training is true happiness. Being aware of suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression, Nhat Hanh emphasises the importance of practising generosity in thinking, speaking and acting. While claiming that happiness depends on one's mental attitude but not on external conditions, he speaks about the need of living happily in the present moment. Nhat Hanh revises the third Precept as true love while emphasising the importance of cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of the whole universe. For him, sexual desire is not love; not engaging in sexual relations without true love and deep commitment is therefore required. This third mindfulness training helps to learn appropriate ways to take care of one's sexual energy and cultivate basic elements of true love: loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness. The fourth mindfulness training is deep listening and loving speech. This concerns commitment to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering in the world. Since words can create happiness or suffering, it is essential to be conscious not to spread news that one does not know to be certain, because it can cause division or discord. The fifth training, nourishment and healing, is linked

81 Nhat Hanh, *The Mindfulness Survival Kit: Five Essential Practices* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2014), 23.

82 Ibid., 22.

to his understanding of suffering caused by un-mindful consumption. Nhat Hanh therefore is committed to the need of cultivating physical and mental health by practising mindful eating, drinking and consuming, while contemplating inter-being and consumerism in a way that preserves the wellbeing of the whole society.[83]

1.4.1.6 Relief of Suffering in True Love

In Nhat Hanh's view, understanding and love are just one. In order to develop understanding, people have to practise looking at all living beings with the eyes of compassion: "[W]hen you understand, you cannot help but love. And when you love, you naturally act in a way that can relieve the suffering of people."[84] Nhat Hanh states that a person cannot simply say 'I love you'; instead, the person needs to do something to lessen the suffering of the person. Nhat Hanh presents four elements of true love in his book, *Teaching on Love*: love (*mettā* in Pāli; *maitrī* in Sanskrit); compassion (*karuṇā* in both Sanskrit and Pāli); altruistic joy (*muditā* in both Pāli and Sanskrit)); and equanimity (*upekkha* in Pāli; in Sanskrit, *upeksha*).

The first element, *mettā*, refers to the intention and capacity to offer joy and happiness. Nhat Hanh claims that to be able to give happiness and joy to the other, it is essential to understand others as the seeds of love are with everyone. The second element, *karuṇā* reveals the intention and capacity to relieve and transform suffering and lighten sorrows. When someone is suffering, it is essential to touch the pain of the person through a deep communication, which is sometimes beyond words. Nhat Hanh states that the Buddha was able to smile at suffering because he knew how to handle his suffering and how to transform it. Nhat Hanh considers a compassionate person as one who is capable of imagining himself/herself in all circumstances. This is the highest meaning of reconciliation. In his deeper understanding of the aspect of compassion, Nhat Hanh claims that instead of blaming the persons who cause us to suffer, it is necessary to realise the suffering of the person who made us suffer, because he/she is also a victim: "[R]econciliation does not mean to sign an agreement with duplicity and cruelty. [R]econciliation opposes all forms of ambition,

83 Cf. Ibid., 27-31.

84 Nhat Hanh, *Peace is Every Step*, 98-99.

without taking sides."[85] Hence, Nhat Hanh rejects the notion of taking sides as he thinks that we exist in both. The third element, *muditā*, which refers to the joy that is filled with peace and contentment, highlights the idea that there is no true love if there is no joy – rejoicing in the success of others. Nhat Hanh stresses the importance of dwelling happily in the present moment rather than thinking of our past or future. With regard to the fourth element, *upekkha,* Nhat Hanh claims that when there is true love there is always freedom. When this element is cultivated, he states that we are able to accept everyone without any discrimination based on religion, ethnicity and colour.[86]

1.5 Summary

Nhat Hanh's teachings are based on the traditional Buddhist sources, yet he states the need of frequently reinterpreting them according to the situation of the contemporary society. The present section of the chapter revealed the basic tenets of engaged Buddhism as taught by Nhat Hanh. Firstly, Buddhism is already engaged Buddhism, if not, it is not Buddhism. Secondly, inter-being (non-separate self, emptiness of a separate self) and impermanence are fundamental to engaged Buddhist practice and peacemaking. Thirdly, socially engaged Buddhist practice includes mindfulness practices, social service and non-partisan advocacy to reduce and stop injustice. Fourthly, engaged Buddhism is the way we live our lives. Peace is not only the absence of war; peace needs to be in each action of our daily lives. Fifthly, teachings and practices must be appropriate for the time and place. Finally, Nhat Hanh says, we continue to learn, and we can learn from everything.[87]

Focusing on his religious tradition and being sensitive to his own context of poverty, suffering and war, Nhat Hanh envisioned a new way of being a Buddhist in a world full of suffering and death. Even though

85 Nhat Hanh, *The Sun My Heart*, 128. Nhat Hanh claims that the first thing in the process of reconciliation is to take time to say sorry for hurting the other party out of one's ignorance in mindfulness.

86 Cf. Nhat Hanh, *Teachings on Love* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007), 1-9.

87 Cf. Patricia Hunt-Perry and Lyn Fine, "All Buddhism is Engaged: Thich Nhat Hanh and the Order of Interbeing," in *Engaged Buddhism in the West,* ed., Christopher S. Queen (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000)), 36.

he was active during the war, his engagement was different from those of most activist Buddhists. The reason was that he was firmly rooted in the core teachings of the Buddha. Nhat Hanh tried to understand suffering and its causes, applying different theories and tools to the Buddhist way of thinking. Even though he was aware that people were suffering due to poverty, he did not define poverty as suffering.

In his view of the causes of suffering, Nhat Hanh recognises ignorance as an important factor to be addressed, which is common to both rich and poor, to oppressor and the oppressed. Nhat Hanh refers to ignorance as the psychological state of individuals. On the one hand he claims that the ones who have all the comforts are ignorant of the people in need; on the other hand, the poor are ignorant and do not see the wonders and happiness of their lives. Nhat Hanh's idea is that each person has happiness within him/herself and what is important is to be conscious of it through frequent mindfulness. Nhat Hanh's vision of ignorance as common to the suffering of both rich and poor leads him to help them understand what motivates them to create suffering in themselves and the other. This avoids dualism.

The one who is ignorant of inter-being, Nhat Hanh describes as not capable of seeing one's own suffering as well as the suffering of others. He stresses the importance of touching reality through meditation as it helps to enter into the other person and identify with the suffering of others; this is solidarity. In solidarity, Nhat Hanh says, one begins to see the world from the point of view of the suffering. It reminds one that everyone and everything is inter-connected – intimacy with suffering in the world. He claims that the suffering of others and his own suffering are not two separate things, but they are one aspect of their inter-being.

Nhat Hanh perceives the positive side of suffering as he considers it to be a means to true happiness and enlightenment. In his explanation of true love, one of the important Buddhist teachings, he highlights it as our capacity to offer joy to the other person while helping him/her to transform his/her suffering. Nhat Hanh claims that when there is true happiness, there cannot be attachment or slavery.

2. Buddhism with a Small 'b': Sulak Sivaraksa

2.1 A Biographical Sketch of Sulak Sivaraksa

> I am not just a Thai. My father's ancestors came from China. My Buddhism comes from India and Sri Lanka. I went to University in Great Britain, taught in North America, and have friends all over the world. Each of these heritages is in me.[88]

'Ajaran' Sulak Sivaraksa,[89] born in 'Thailand (Siam)' in 1933 into a family of Chinese ancestry, is a prominent Buddhist writer, an outspoken Thai intellectual, activist, founder and director of numerous organisations.[90] Sivaraksa is the co-founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. All his publications and organisations address issues of justice, peace and human rights.[91]

In the early 1940s, Sivaraksa was a monk in a temple for two years. As he was raised in a prosperous aristocratic family, his parents sent him to study in well-known Anglican and Catholic schools in Bangkok and he was sent to England for higher studies where he earned degrees in law and philosophy. After he returned from his studies abroad and in spite of all the comforts he enjoyed during his childhood and youth, Sivaraksa chose a different path than accumulating money or political clout: "he [Sulak] stepped outside the walls of his palace, he looked carefully, intimately, at the suffering, exploitation, and aggression that pervaded the world. And Sulak made a decision not to return to the palace of conventional power and prestige."[92]

In the early 1960s, after his studies in England, Sivaraksa returned to Siam, a then barren intellectual landscape. He began his career as an

88 Sulak Sivaraksa, *The Wisdom of Sustainability: Buddhist Economics for the 21st Century* (Hawai'i': Koa Books, 2009), 84.

89 'Ajarn' is an honorific term among Thais for someone they respect and have learned a great deal from.

90 Sivarakasa says that his country was known as Siam until 1939, when its name was changed to Thailand, a hybrid Anglicised word emblematic of the crisis of traditional Siamese Buddhist values. Therefore, he generally refers to the country as Siam, not Thailand. Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, *The Wisdom of Sustainability*, 9.

91 Cf. Donald K. Swearer, "Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, 204.

92 Judith Simmer-Brown, quoted by Matteo Pistono "The Engaged Buddhism of Sulak Sivaraksa": http://www.kyotojournal.org/the-journal/heart-work/the-engaged-buddhism-of-sulak-sivaraksa/ (accessed 8 June 2015).

editor of the journal, *The Social Science Review*, which helped to influence many young students in the country to overthrow the military regime in 1973. After he returned from his studies in England, he thought that he could teach many things to the poor, especially poor farmers in his country. This mentality of Sivaraksa was shaken by the challenge of the progressive Thai prince Sitthiporn, who happened to meet Sivaraksa and asked him whether he knows anything about farmers and their suffering. Then Sivaraksa realised that it was time for him to change his mind and be involved in action. He saw clearly how his arrogant, top-down approach was fundamentally flawed. Sivaraksa began to visit rural villages, temples and the terraced rice fields to understand the actual condition of the people. The farmers and workers he met taught him a profound lesson, one he reiterates to this day. The lesson is that to address a suffering situation, be it poverty, war, or environmental disaster, one must go and be with the suffering itself, with the people who are affected.[93] Hence Sivaraksa's transformation from a top-down approach to a grassroots campaign for social justice was shaped by the experience of being with rural people, farmers and students. This experience made him rethink the religion of his country, Buddhism, the monasticism, the economy and the government.

Sivaraksa's social activism, writings and speeches have brought him into conflict with authorities in his country. He was exiled from Thailand from 1976 to 1977 and was jailed four times from 1991 to 1994. In 1984, he was charged of *lese majeste* (defamation of the monarchy) and imprisoned for publishing his book, *Unmasking Thai Society*. However, despite all these barriers, no one could silence him because Sivaraksa was convinced that what he was doing was rooted in the teachings of the Buddha.

In his social Buddhist activism, Sivaraksa was influenced by Buddhadasa *bhikkhu*, who is his spiritual teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, Dalai Lama, Mahatma Gandhi, and the Quakers. In his path towards a just society, he received awards such as the Right Livelihood Award in 1995, the UNPO Human Rights Award in 1998, the Millennium Gandhi Award in 2001 and the Niwano Peace Prize in 2011. He states that the transformation of society has to begin within individuals: personal transformation is the

93 Cf. Matteo Pistono "The Engaged Buddhism of Sulak Sivaraksa": http://www.kyotojournal.org/the-journal/heart-work/the-engaged-buddhism-of-sulak-sivaraksa/ (accessed 8 June 2015).

starting point: "peace can prevail in a society only when individuals in that society are at peace. When greed, hatred and ignorance govern our personal affairs, they will also be present in our society's institutions, preventing lasting social change. Real security depends on working on ourselves."[94]

2.2 Basic Characteristics of Sulak Sivaraksa's Philosophical Method

Sivaraksa declares that his spiritual teacher Buddhadasa *bhikkhu* taught him that the first law of the natural world is inter-dependence, which is called *dhamma* by the Buddha. Sivaraksa understands everything in this world in terms of inter-relatedness; accordingly, he does not consider Buddhism to be separate from society. While rejecting the dichotomy between spiritual life and social life, he tries to see the inter-relatedness amongst everything in life. Sivaraksa sees that religion, politics, economy and all the other elements in life are not isolated.

2.3 The Philosophical Conceptualisation of Sulak Sivaraksa

Sivaraksa's task of transforming the society with Buddhist teachings begins with the transformation of individuals. He encourages Buddhist practitioners to develop the Buddhist teachings of mindfulness, tolerance, and inter-connectedness. He states that one's spiritual progress is an important element in relieving the suffering within society, a link between one's spiritual path and social reform.

In Sivaraksa's view, although Buddhism with a capital 'B' can be tribal in a very negative sense and can legitimise dictatorial regimes, if we were, however, to direct our efforts towards universal love, we could spell it with a small 'b'.[95] According to his teachings, the first law of Buddhism with a small 'b' should be as Nhat Hanh says, "[D]o not be idolatrous about, or bound to, any doctrine, theory or ideology, even Buddhist ones. All systems of thoughts are guiding means; they are not absolute truths [a precept of the fourteen precepts of Tiep Hien or the order of Inter-being]."[96]

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94 Sulak Sivaraksa, quoted by Matteo Pistono "The Engaged Buddhism of Sulak Sivaraksa": http://www.kyotojournal.org/the-journal/heart-work/the-engaged-buddhism-of-sulak-sivaraksa/ (accessed 8 June 2015).

95 Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, "Buddhism and Tolerance for Diversity of Religion and Belief": http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebdha168.htm (accessed 8 June 2015).

96 Nhat Hanh, "The Fourteen Precepts on Engaged Buddhism": http://viewonbuddhism.org/resources/14_precepts.html (accessed 2 June 2015).

2.4 Sulak Sivaraksa's Understanding of Suffering

Sivaraksa's vision of the ideal society is fundamentally inspired by re-interpretation or adaptation of traditional Buddhism. In an interview he states the importance of re-thinking the understanding of the core Buddhist teaching on suffering and the cause of suffering: "suffering at the time of the Buddha was certainly often dreadful, but it was simpler to understand; the inter-relatedness of all phenomena that is a main teaching of the Buddha was simpler then and is much more complex now."[97] Sivaraksa therefore comprehends not only the personal aspect of suffering, but also addresses the suffering caused by social, economic and political structures in contemporary society.

In Sivaraksa's view the Buddhists need help from the social scientists because without the work of these disciplines people become deluded and think that Buddhist practice can solve everything. Sivaraksa clearly affirms, "[W]ithout transforming the Buddhist sense of wisdom to bring in understanding of and response to social reality, Buddhism will not be so relevant and might only appeal to the middle class. If we are not careful, it will become a kind of escapism."[98]

For Sivaraksa, the classical Buddhist teachings of the Four Noble Truths, *nirvāṇa*, Inter-dependent Co-arising, and No-self are not mere theories but essential guidelines for personal and social transformation.

2.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

2.4.1.1 The General Understanding of Suffering

Sivaraksa applies the teachings of the Buddha on the Four Noble Truths to situations of violent structures in society: (1) Suffering exists; (2) Suffering has different causes; (3) Producing the causes of suffering can be eliminated; and (4) A path of mindful living can show us the way.[99]

Sivaraksa begins his analysis of suffering by acknowledging suffering on both sides – suffering of both the oppressed and the oppressor,

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97 Donald Rothberg "A Thai Perspective on Socially Engaged Buddhism: A Conversation with Sulak Sivaraksa," *ReVision* 15, no.3 (Winter 1993), 123: http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-ADM/rothberg.htm (accessed 5 June 2015).

98 Sulak Sivaraksa, "A Thai Perspective on Socially Buddhism: A Conversation with Sulak Sivaraksa," 124

99 Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, *The Wisdom of Sustainability*, 23.

employer and employee, and people in the North and the South. Secondly, he claims that it is important to understand the different causes that generate suffering. The cause is never something outside, it is also important to recognise one's own psychological dimension. According to Sivaraksa, the third Noble Truth does not presuppose that we can reach a state of liberation, but encourages grappling with the internal and external factors of the causes. The fourth Noble Truth portrays how to live in ways that reduce suffering, which the Buddha called the Eightfold Path: "[T]his path points to ways that awareness can be deepened and the parts of our lives brought into harmony. We begin by living mindfully. Then we can use these tools to dismantle oppressive systems and create a culture of peace."[100] Sivaraksa says that unless the Buddhists make an effort to put these truths into practice, there is no point in intellectually understanding them. If people take the message of the Buddha seriously, they regard suffering as something real and threatening, which leads them to take some action.[101]

2.4.1.2 A Broader View of Suffering

Sulak Sivaraksa states that the heart of Buddhist teachings can have a great impact on the eradication of suffering from society. In line with the Buddhist teaching that greed, hatred and ignorance are the root causes of suffering, Sivaraksa sees that social suffering also arises from these roots of evil.

> When Prince Siddhattha saw an old man, a sick man, and a wandering monk, he was moved to seek salvation, and eventually he became the Buddha, the Awakened One. The suffering of the present day, such as that which brought about Bhopal and Chernobyl, should move many of us to think together and act together to overcome such death and destruction, to bring about the awakening of humankind.[102]

Sivaraksa identifies three poisons; greed, hatred and ignorance, which are used immorally by the rich and powerful and result in suffering in the whole of society. He argues that the first step to overcome suffering is

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100 Ibid., 24.

101 Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, "Buddhism in a World of Change," in *Engaged Buddhist Reader,* 71.

102 Sulak Sivaraksa, "Buddhism in a World of Change: Politics Must be Related to Religion," in *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Fred Eppsteiner (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1988), 9.

to become aware of the structural violence in society.[103] Instead of thinking of violence as limited to acts of war he perceives violence in terms of 'structural' violence, that is, violence inherent in the very structures of societies. In Sivaraksa's point of view, structural violence includes elitism, ethnocentrism, classism, racism, sexism, nationalism, heterosexism, and ageism. It can be political, repressive, economic, or exploitative.[104] In this context of structural violence, Sivaraksa recognises the main elements that cause suffering at religious, political, economic and global levels.

Sivaraksa opposes the institutionalised violence within Buddhist structures that offer little spirituality, which he calls Buddhism with a capital 'B'. In his view, Buddhism, as practised in most Asian countries today, serves mainly to legitimise dictatorial regimes and multi-national corporations. As Matteo Pistono says, "whether it is government-backed clergy or simply large Buddhist organisations, Sulak sees the seeds of chauvinism, prejudice, and nationalism being sown when the Buddhist teachings are used by individuals and groups to advance a politically-motivated agenda."[105] Sivaraksa suggests, "[I]f we Buddhists want to redirect our energies towards enlightenment and universal love, we should begin by spelling Buddhism with a small 'b'. Buddhism with a small 'b' means concentrating on the message of the Buddha and paying attention to myth, culture, and ceremony."[106]

In the view of Sivaraksa, colonisation by Western powers caused various upheavals in the colonised countries. For example, he argues, before colonialism the fertile lands of Southeast Asia were known as the 'Rice Bowl' of Asia due to their self-sufficiency. Today with modernised agriculture and under neo-colonialism, many poor farmers have left their lands due to the prevailing imbalance of the village production system. Even though globalisation – which sounds value-neutral – preaches the inter-dependence of nations, during the last half century it has created

103 Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, *Conflict, Culture, Change: Engaged Buddhism in a Globalizing World* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 60.

104 Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, *The Wisdom of Sustainability*, 14.

105 Matteo Pistono "The Engaged Buddhism of Sulak Sivaraksa": http://www.kyotojournal.org/the-journal/heart-work/the-engaged-buddhism-of-sulak-sivaraksa/ (accessed 8 June 2015).

106 Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society*, ed. Tom Ginsburg (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993), 68.

inequalities between haves and have-nots, investors and workers, and North and South. He names consumerism, where more is considered better, and capitalism, as the most prevalent modern forms of greed. He describes how transnational capital uses the media to tempt people to over-purchase products through the big corporations' advertisement campaigns.[107] Sivaraksa also states that the economic forces of globalisation along with multi-national corporations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation, have on the one hand sentenced many people to poverty and on the other, have given rise to violence. Eventually, all these gaps between nations, rich and poor, ended up with militarism embodying hatred as its core basis.

In his analysis of suffering in the present society, Sivaraksa recognises not only the suffering of the people in the Third World, but also the suffering in the First World: "the North does not fare all that well, either. Its people are addicted to consumerism, mass culture, and drugs. They suffer from pollution, environmental degradation, and the loss of fundamental values."[108] Sivaraksa states, "[A]s a Buddhist, I do not consider the exploitation of comparative advantage to be the ultimate objective of society. I am interested in a social organisation's capacity to address human suffering, promote justice, and allow individuals to realise their potential."[109]

Sivaraksa openly addresses the structural violence within his own religious institution, his country, and global society that creates suffering in the lives of all sentient beings. In Sivaraksa's view, Buddhists need to practise the teachings of the Buddha in a way that is relevant to today's social, political, economic context: "as a Buddhist, if one is not radical and does not work to eliminate suffering, one may end up only taking a little bit of Buddhism for one's individual ego. But Buddhism is not often radical; it coexists too easily with capitalism and consumerism."[110]

Sivaraksa does not try to introduce a new Buddhism, but what he emphasises is how individuals ought to apply Buddhist teachings to modern reality. Hence, his understanding of Buddhism with a small 'b' reflects his approach toward Buddhist practice.

107 Cf. Ibid., 5-6.

108 Sulak Sivaraksa, *The Wisdom of Sustainability*, 72.

109 Ibid., 30.

110 Sulak Sivaraksa, "A Thai Perspective on Socially Buddhism: A Conversation with Sulak Sivaraksa," 126.

2.4.1.3 Reinterpretation of the Classical Five Precepts

A Buddhist may say that he/she is a good Buddhist as he/she does not kill, does not steal, does not commit adultery and does not lie, but, asserts Sivaraksa, in a complicated society these simple interpretations of ethical norms are not sufficient. He therefore reinterpreted the classical Five Precepts for this day and age.

With regard to the first Precept, Sivaraksa states that to refrain from killing beings is not a simple precept in modern society. Hence it is necessary to ask questions like, "do we allow our tax money to go for armaments? Do we keep ourselves separate from the political realm and not challenge the government? Should we breed animals for consumption?"[111] All Buddhists may not be killing outright, but Sivaraska feels that it is relevant to try and understand how their decisions, actions and silence might support wars, massacres and racial conflicts. As regards the second Precept of refraining from taking what is not ours, Sivaraksa argues again that all Buddhists may not literally steal, but it is necessary to ask, "do we allow the rich countries to exploit the poor countries through the workings of the international banking system and the international economic order? Do we allow industrial societies to exploit the poor generally?"[112]

In speaking of the third Precept, Sivaraksa says that Buddhists should not just think about adultery and hurting others, but that it is essential to be serious about gender issues in society, such as male domination and the exploitation of women through the selfish agendas of capitalism. In the third Precept Sivaraksa emphasises the need for stopping the exploitation of women in society. In his reinterpretation of the fourth Precept, he states the importance of becoming aware of all lies and exaggerations in political, economic and cultural structures. He further recognises that it is the responsibility of those who are bound to keep these Precepts to challenge the structural violence of and in the world, even when it is legal. The fifth Precept, refraining from intoxicants, deals with peace and justice. Sivaraksa claims that Third World farmers grow heroin, cocoa, coffee, and tobacco because the economic system makes it impossible for them to support themselves by growing rice and vegetables.

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111 Sulak Sivaraksa, "A Thai Perspective on Socially Buddhism: A Conversation with Sulak Sivaraksa," 127.

112 Ibid., 127.

Sivaraksa's interpretation of the Five Precepts is not entirely personal, as it has been interpreted throughout classical Buddhism. The Precept is both personal and global and creates a consciousness of social justice grounded in the teachings of the Noble Eightfold Path.

> If you take it as an ethical or legal code, *sila* [precept] by itself becomes something very negative. But if you link *sila* with *samadhi* you can develop seeds of peace within. You can develop critical self-awareness, critical of yourself, of your society or of your lifestyle. In this way, *sila* becomes something meaningful, and you can tackle problems with *sila*, not just personal relations but oppressive systems, violent structures and violent culture. Then *sila* becomes something more modern and universal. [113]

In Sivaraksa's point of view, all these sufferings can be reduced or totally eradicated by the Buddhist approach of right understanding of the nature of things. As Buddhism holds, to attain understanding one must begin practising to understand himself/herself.

2.4.1.4 Buddhist Approach of Right Understanding

In the view of Sivaraksa, as modern philosophy began with René Descartes who said, *Cogito ergo sum* – I think therefore I am – modern people are bound by thinking, but, he says:

> We in the East used to have a different kind of civilisation and a different style of life, but we were forced to open our countries to the West. When we opened our countries to the West, we blindly followed the West …. I think it is about time we learn. Something has gone wrong fundamentally. Perhaps it is time to come back to our own roots.[114]

Sivaraksa often says that breathing is the most important element in life. Once we learn to breathe mindfully, we can transform root causes of suffering in our personal lives as well as in society.

Sivaraksa's Buddhist model of development must begin with the personal understanding: *citta sikkhā* or the contemplation of the mind. He considers meditation or mindfulness to be important for Buddhists to attain the insight of understanding, because, he says, one has to begin

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113 Sulak Sivaraksa, "Integrating Head and Heart: Indigenous Alternatives to Modernity": http://www17.ocn.ne.jp/~ogigaya/tsangha/sulakdsbook.html (accessed 10 June 2015).

114 Sulak Sivaraksa, "Something is Fundamentally Wrong": http://ishes.org/en/interview/itv03_01.html (accessed 6 June 2015).

with a critical understanding of oneself if the drive is to reach a critical understanding of one's community, society and nation. Buddhists will thus be able to become conscious of how greed, hatred and ignorance in all layers of society generate suffering in modern times. The transformation of society requires a personal and spiritual change first or at least simultaneously and mindfulness is therefore essential in the process. Nevertheless, in his view, meditation/mindfulness alone is not sufficient to transform society; it is the first step in creating a harmonious society: "[T]his new worldview requires a transformation of self-goals and a new lens for understanding the problems of structural violence, environmental degradation, and consumerism. This new lens requires us to look beyond a traditional cost-benefit analysis and to accept that everything has multiple causes and innumerable effects."[115]

2.4.1.5 Reinterpretation of Freedom

Sulak Sivaraksa articulates four levels of freedom: (1) Physical freedom – freedom from the shortage of basic needs; (2) Social freedom – freedom from oppression, persecution, exploitation and discrimination; (3) Emotional freedom – freedom from mental defilement and suffering; and (4) Intellectual freedom of mind – freedom through knowledge and wisdom; this is the culmination of the state of selfishness. Sivaraksa understands *nirvāṇa* to be that state of personal realisation when one has extinguished worldly attachments and reaches in this life the deliverance of mind through wisdom. Therefore, *nirvāṇa* should not be a metaphysical reality but a state of being. It is not a theory but an experience beyond the limits of the mundane.[116]

In Sivaraksa's view, the Buddhist understanding of enlightenment and wisdom reveal that it is not always inside or personal. An individual must have the wisdom to understand himself/herself as well as society. While agreeing with the notion that it was the Buddha's intention to liberate individuals from their suffering, Sivaraksa says that the Buddha's ultimate intention was to liberate the whole of society from its bondage. According to Sivaraksa, by creating a *saṅgha* as an alternative community within a larger society, the Buddha wished to influence the entire society. The

115 Sulak Sivaraksa, *Conflict, Culture, Change*, 60.

116 Cf. Donald K. Swearer, "Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society," 222.

Buddha's wish was to see the members of this community as "the ideals of personal community, economic simplicity, and spiritual cultivation. Both represent the values of wisdom, non-attachment and equanimity."[117]

> There is the old tradition that monks should not have more than three robes, only one bowl, one thread, one needle, and one pair of sandals. We are also taught not to be attached or give great significance to money even if we say people need money for survival. The more we are self-reliant, growing our own food, and so on, the less money becomes important. Whatever we grow we are willing to share with others. That is why I think that you need to be close to nature and be with people. In our traditional society, it has always been like this …. I think people should think seriously and question consumerism, promoting nongreed, nonhatred, and nondelusion, educating people about alternatives to materialism and about how to make capitalism more sane.[118]

The society at the time of the Buddha was different from contemporary society. As Sivaraksa says, during the time of the Buddha, one changed person could make a big impact on larger society as some examples in Buddhists texts show. In modern society it is, practically speaking, not easy for an individual to make a big impact on society, unless by trying to change the whole system. In Sivaraksa's view, right understanding is therefore essential in thinking of how to change the violence in society. This is where Sivaraksa sees the importance of the *bodhisatva* vow to save all sentient beings from their suffering with equanimity and detachment: "the *bodhisatva*, the person committed to liberate all others, does not run away from violence and suffering. The *bodhisatva* has both the wisdom and compassion to understand and respond to suffering."[119]

Sivaraksa emphasises the importance of the support of the community. In his observation, instead of a communitarian bond, life in industrialised societies is dominated by separation, individualism, and consumption, none of which are conducive to socially engaged spirituality. Therefore, in order to transform the existing society, the community must be based on ethical precepts that cultivate non-violence.

Speaking about non-violence, Sivaraksa reiterates the powerful verse of the *Dhammapada*: "[H]atred does not eradicate hatred. Only by loving-

117 Ibid., 213.

118 Sulak Sivaraksa, "A Thai Perspective on Socially Buddhism: A Conversation with Sulak Sivaraksa," 126.

119 Sulak Sivaraksa, *Conflict, Culture, Change*, 5.

kindness is hatred dissolved. This law is ancient and eternal."[120] Non-violence is the most basic teaching of the Buddha. Overcoming dualistic thinking is the basis of non-violence, and non-violence is the basis for peace. "Non-violence is not only the absence of violence."[121]

> Buddhism requires an engagement in social, economic and political affairs. One cannot overcome the limits of the individual self in a selfish and hermetical manner …. I want all those (not just Westerners) who are captivated by the culture and ideology of consumerism and indoctrinated by the belief in the linearity of history to see the Buddha as a simple and humble monk. The teachings of the Buddha, if properly understood and upheld, provide a different lens to see the world.[122]

2.5 Summary

For Sulak Sivaraksa, Buddhism is a process of questioning and critique: questioning oneself, society and country, including one's own religious teachings in a critical manner. He understands suffering in society in relation to the teachings of the Buddha based on the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Five Precepts, while reinterpreting them in a modern social context.

Sivaraksa highlights how the three poisons of greed, hatred and ignorance cause suffering in individuals as well as in society. He does not see suffering in this complex society as the result of *kamma,* rather he recognises the connection between suffering of all sentient beings as a result of structural violence in society. As Buddhism insists, once we lose the inter-relatedness of all life, the repercussion is suffering. He observes that many Third World countries, including his own country, are subjected to the storm of capitalism and greed in the name of globalisation, which generates suffering. Many individuals in this particular social context are attracted to material comforts and any form of quantitative success, but many of them are not aware of it. Even when they are aware of the present situation, they fail to criticise it, Sivaraksa feels. Hence, the challenge that many engaged Buddhists face, including Sivaraksa, is "how to show that Buddhism can be a force to soften the damage caused to the human spirit by the onward march of globalization."[123]

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120 Ibid., 7.

121 Ibid., 13.

122 Ibid., 41.

123 Nicholas Bennett, Introduction to Sulak Sivaraksa*, The Wisdom of Sustainability*, 5.

3. Oneness of the Whole Universe: Bernard Glassman

3.1 A Biographical Sketch of Bernard Glassman

'Tetsugen'[124] Bernard (Bernie) Glassman is a world-renowned pioneer in the American Zen movement. He is an American Zen Buddhist Roshi (Zen Master or a Sōtō Zen Teacher), an author, accomplished academic and co-founder of the Zen Peace Makers, which was established in 1996 with the aim of social transformation through Zen teaching and social action.

Glassman was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1939 into a close knit Jewish American family. As Claudia Hudson says, "[H]is [Glassman's] parents were from Eastern Europe and brought with them strong opinions, particularly about socialism, which influenced Bernie's personality and ideals."[125] Glassman first encountered Zen in 1958 and from that year onwards he was interested in studying and practising Zen. It led him to be ordained as a Zen priest in 1970. Glassman eventually received *dhamma* Transmission in 1976 and became the first *dhamma* successor of the Japanese Zen Buddhist teacher Taizan Maezumi-Roshi. He holds a doctorate in applied mathematics and worked as an aeronautical engineer for McDonnell Douglas in California, but Glassman felt there was more to life than merely earthly success. Better yet, he found a way to make his own successes beneficial to others.[126]

Glassman had the deepest desire to bring Zen into the daily lives of people and emphasised acting meditation rather than simply focusing on sitting meditation. He began to find some alternative ways to put this idea into practice while helping and empowering people who were suffering and in need. In his broader view of life and society, he began the Greyston bakery, which did not have as objective a potential profit, but "issues of social action along with the integration of Zen practice in daily life."[127] He also founded the Greyston Mandela, a network of successful

124 Bernards Glassman Roshi's Dhamma name is Tetsugen, which means 'to penetrate mystery'.

125 Claudia Herrera Hudson, "Peace Maker Hero: Roshi Bernie Glassman": http://myhero.com/hero.asp?hero=roshibernieglassman (accessed 12 June 2015).

126 Cf. Claudia Herrera Hudson, "Peace Maker Hero: Roshi Bernie Glassman": http://myhero.com/hero.asp?hero=roshibernieglassman (accessed 12 June 2015).

127 Claudia Herrera Hudson, "Peace Maker Hero: Roshi Bernie Glassman": http://myhero.com/hero.asp?hero=roshibernieglassman (accessed 12 June 2015).

social-economic community development organisations enlightened by Buddhist values. It included the bakery and the Greyston Family Inn – a revolutionary apartment building for formerly homeless and low income working-families, with such provisions as childcare services, health care programs, and alternative treatment for people with AIDS as well as many other social services.

Glassman's involvement with people in society, especially with suffering people, impressed on him the importance of gaining a fuller understanding of the lives of those whom his organisations were helping: homeless people. Because he wanted to have first-hand experience of the homeless, Glassman started with what became an annual tradition of 'street retreats', living on the streets as homeless people. Later on, following the success of this programme, he extended his experience of street retreats to the annual Bearing Witness Retreats in Auschwitz, to remember and honour those who suffered during the enormous tragedy that took place there during the World War II.

For his vision of living Zen Buddhism in the contemporary social reality, Glassman received several awards such as, the '1991 Best of America for Social Action', and 'The Ethics in Action Award'. Christopher Queen, in speaking of Bernard Glassman says that Glassman adopted Buddhism in later life because it gave expression to thoughts and feelings he already had: "a fierce compassion for discarded people, belief in the potential for wholeness in life, and a vision of society founded on human dignity and inter-dependence."[128]

3.2 Basic Characteristics of Bernard Glassman's Philosophical Method

Glassman dedicated himself to develop a Buddhist philosophy that combines the teachings of Buddhism and the social responsibility of reducing the suffering and pain of all beings. He appreciates the Buddhist teaching on inter-dependence and in line with it, his philosophy is always inter-connected with all spheres in society. On the other hand, as he considers Zen to be life, his method of doing philosophy is teaching/learning Buddhist teachings and bearing witness to the different situations

128 Christopher S. Queen, "Glassman Roshi and the Peacemaker Order: Three Encounters," in *Engaged Buddhism in the West*, ed. Christopher S. Queen (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 96.

in society. In this process of living Zen, Glassman sees the importance of being open to new findings or new theories that present themselves in today's scientifically developed world.

3.3 The Philosophical Conceptualisation of Bernard Glassman

A major point in Glassman's philosophical imagination is the emphasis on two central teachings in the Buddhist tradition: the oneness of life and universal inter-dependence. Glassman, strongly affirms the notion based on Buddhist teachings, that everything and everyone in the whole universe is inter-dependent and that all are 'One Body'. Therefore, he very clearly rejects the idea of dualism. In this non-dualistic way of thinking he does not see the 'other' as a separate being. There is no 'other', the part is the whole and the whole is the part; each piece is the whole and affirms the need of seeing the oneness of life without excluding anything or anyone in the universe.

Speaking of the oneness of life, Glassman does not deny the reality of difference among beings. In his view, not only we are different from each other, but everything is also different from one moment to the next as everything is changing. For him, oneness and diversity are therefore the same thing: by accepting the differences, we come together as one people.[129]

3.4 Bernard Glassman's Understanding of Suffering

Once, while Glassman was giving a *dhamma* talk and answering a question on suffering, on how he listens to pain when there are no answers, he said:

> *Kanzeon*, 'the listener of the suffering', means fully embodying listening, not with the ears, but listening with the pores of the body, with the hairs on the head, with the feet, listening and fully becoming the pains of the world …. So *Avalokiteshvara – Kanzeon* – takes a vow to bring an end to all the sufferings, but he/she/it was put into the position of listening to all this stuff and having no answers.[130]

In Glassman's view, when people realise the oneness of life, then each person tries to reduce the suffering of the other in the world.

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129 Cf. Bernard Glassman, *Bearing Witness: A Zen Master's Lessons in Making Peace* (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2013), 50-55.

130 Bernard Glassman, quoted by Christopher S. Queen, "Glassman Roshi and the Peacemaker Order: Three Encounters," 100.

3.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

3.4.1.1 The General Understanding of Suffering

Action is very important to Glassman because for him social action and spiritual development are two sides of the same coin. This is his reason for being engaged in different social activities.

To understand suffering from Glassman's point of view it is necessary to deal with some important teachings of Zen Buddhism, as he is highly influenced by the teachings of Zen Buddhism. Glassman's book, *Infinite Circle: Studies in Zen*, illuminates three key teachings of Zen Buddhism that concern the relationship between doing Zen and being socially engaged.

3.4.1.2 The Heart Sutra (*Maha Prajnaparamita Hrdaya Sutra*)

Glassman explains the title 'The Heart of Perfection of Great Wisdom Sutra', which is the key text of the Sōtō Zen school, word for word. According to him, the word *maha* is commonly translated as 'great' in a quantitative and qualitative sense. It is great and not outside or inside; it is all-inclusive and nothing is left out. Therefore, he says, *maha* is the Way (Tao): "Tao is everything. Each of us is the way; each of us is walking the way."[131]

The term *paññā* is described as the wisdom of emptiness. In Glassman's view, *paññā* is the functioning of *maha*, the One Body or everything as it is. Therefore, he says, we cannot look at *Paññā* in terms of right and wrong, good and bad, because it cuts away all dualism and leaves only what is: "*paññā* is the functioning of *maha* and *maha* is nothing but, *paññā* is our functioning and we are nothing but *paññā*."[132]

The term *pāramitā* [Pāli : *Pāramī*] or perfection means 'at the other shore', *param* literally means 'to go to the other shore'. In Glassman's view, "instead of thinking of going from the state of delusion to the state of enlightenment, what *pāramitā* means is that we are already there. *This* is the other shore; *this* is the state of enlightenment."[133] It is important to

131 Bernie Glassman, *Infinite Circle: Teachings in Zen* (Boston and London: Shambala Publications, 2002), 18.

132 Ibid., 19.

133 Ibid., 19.

understand that in Zen, there is neither future nor past; it is all now. In other words, there is nowhere to go, nowhere to reach because it is all here and all One Body. This is the reality. As Glassman claims, perfection means neither good nor bad, because all these are judgments of persons. Hence, when it is said that something is perfect, it means the absence of dichotomy or dualism. However, Glassman clearly says that "[T]his does not mean that evil does not exist or that good and bad do not exist. It simply means that they are judgments that exist in the realm of the relative, colours we add to the thing itself."[134] Glassman explains the threads that run through everything; (1) Suture – a journey or sewing of two together into one; and (2) Warp – the threads that run through everything, the foundation thread of a weaving or the interweaving of all things.[135] The term 'Heart' or the essence of the Enlightened Way denotes not-knowing. Glassman states that by letting go of our expectations, we are with things as they are and we realise the Heart of the Perfection of Great Wisdom *sutras*. In order to understand this *sutra*, he highlights the need to 'wake up'.

The First Part of the Heart *Sutra*

1) Enlightenment Experience

Glassman shares the message the Buddha proclaimed in his enlightenment "How wonderful! How wonderful! Everything as it is enlightened!"[136] Glassman further elaborates two important aspects of practice and life based on this statement. They are; (1) The intrinsic aspect – intrinsically, we are enlightened, we are the Buddha; and (2) The experiential aspect – experientially, we are not enlightened because, we have yet to experience this fact.

In line with the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, Glassman indicates an important distinction between someone who practises only to attain individual liberation, and the *bodhisatva* who makes a vow to remain in the world until every creature comes to the realisation of oneness. Glassman clearly points out that the realisation of enlightenment does not put an end to problems, yet what is understood is that the suffering itself is nothing but the functioning of the Enlightened Way. What is needed,

134 Ibid., 23.

135 Cf. Ibid., 23.

136 Ibid., 25.

is that having realised that there is suffering or pain, "we take care of the suffering, we take care of the pain."[137]

In Glassman's view, the phrases 'One Body', 'we are enlightened', 'we are *maha*', are meaningless unless we directly manifest it in action in order to change it. For him, it is important to move beyond the realm of conceptualisation. Being and doing are no longer separate, yet they are just being doing: "[T]rue non-attachment is to be neither separate from nor clinging to what is. Instead of living in the realm of ideas and feelings about whatever is happening, we live in the realm of action."[138] Therefore, in his view, "[T]here is no way that any situation can stay as it is. Change is nothing but the very functioning of life itself.[139]

2) The Mutual Inter-Dependence

Glassman claims that everyone is totally affected by every other thing in the whole universe: the part is the whole and the whole is the part. If we can really see the world of oneness, emptiness, we understand everything. As he states, Zen studies are concerned with three things: (1) The world of difference or the world of the relative/of dualism (form); (2) The world of emptiness (oneness); and (3) The relationship between these two (which is called harmony). This is the way of studying the three Treasures: "[T]he Buddha, which refers to the world of oneness; the *dhamma*, which is the world of form; and the *saṅgha* or the relationship that says the two are really the same thing."[140]

Glassman elaborates on Buddha, *dhamma* and *saṅgha*, saying firstly, that once a person sees what it is then he/she sees everything; all things are nothing other than emptiness: One Body. Secondly, being aware of the emptiness of all things, "we see it as all the differences". Thirdly, people see the relationship of these two: emptiness and difference are the same. However, "… while we see this or not, we are intrinsically *paññā*. We are everything, but we have to realise it, we have to experience it."[141] For Glassman, this is what *nirvāṇa* is in Zen studies. In this realisation,

137 Ibid., 20.
138 Ibid., 31.
139 Ibid., 32.
140 Ibid., 34.
141 Ibid., 34.

one leaves the world of attachment, the world of *saṃsāra* and achieves compassion, which is the functioning of the state of oneness.

In Glassman's point of view, at every moment everything is changing: just movement. Everything people do affects the past, present and future, because all is right now – This is it. That is why the Buddha taught that the chain of conditions could be broken at any point by letting go of the self.

3) The Interpretation of the Four Noble Truths

With regard to the first two Noble Truths, Glassman states that life is *dukkha* and there is a cause of suffering, and that is due to the fact that everything is 'change'. In speaking of the third Noble Truth, he says that one way to put an end to suffering is to live life as it is, which we do by eliminating misconceptions. In his view, when a person is detached from his/her notions of self, permanence, ego or any other expectation, there is no longer suffering. By saying so, he does not mean that suffering and pain are at an end, but what he means is that "being one with pain, there is no separation."[142] In this sense, there is no subject who suffers and no object that is suffered: the suffering is gone.[143] Glassman distinguishes egocentric suffering – suffering because of attachment to the notion of self – from selfless suffering – the experience of suffering when a person lets go of the self. Obviously then, even when we let go of the self, there is still suffering, because life, which is active, expansive and dynamic is suffering. Of these two sufferings, selfless suffering is the functioning of *paññā,* wisdom and this is what Glassman calls compassion. When we experience or see the suffering in the world, Glassman says, we need to expand ourselves to take care of it. In selfless suffering there are two responses: (1) life-denying and; (2) life-affirming.

The fourth Noble Truth, which is the end of suffering, is the Eightfold Path. In speaking of the eight elements of the Eightfold Path, Glassman says that the word 'right' is not used in the dualistic sense of right as opposed to wrong, but the meaning of 'right' is 'non'. The word, 'non' even though it seems an ordinary negation, it actually implies radical affirmation: "what it negates is also our notions and ideas, not the action. When I let go of all my ideas about an action, I'm not separate from either

142 Ibid., 48.

143 Cf. Ibid., 48.

action or non-action, which is right action."[144] To sum up, Glassman states that the Eightfold Path describes eight different ways of letting go. He further says, "[E]liminate all concepts and you have the right view. Then go one step further and eliminate non-view as well."[145]

The Second Part of the Heart *Sutra*

1) The Functioning of the *Bodhisatva*

For Glassman, everyone and everything in this universe is just 'One Body' and the functioning of the One Body is *paññā,* wisdom – just the function of what is. Speaking of the second part of the Heart *Sutra*, Glassman claims that we are the *bodhisatva-s*, and *bodhisatva-s* live six *Pāramitā*. The first *Pāramitā* is *paññāpāramitā*, which is the functioning of wisdom and it is the only *Pāramitā* mentioned explicitly in the Heart Sutra. The second *Pāramitā* is *Śīla*, [Pāli: Sila] which is translated as 'precepts' or 'discipline' and refers to the aspects of the enlightened life. The third *Paramita*, *Kṣānti* [Pāli: *Khanti*] is translated as 'patience'. In Glassman's view, when a person sees things as they are, he/she has to be patient. The fourth *Pāramitā* is *Vīrya* [Pāli: Vīriya] or effort, which means exerting ourselves. The fifth *Pāramitā* is *Samādhi*, which is translated as concentration. The last *Pāramitā* is *Paññā*.

In Glassman's view, "Zen is life. It's coming to the realisation that all things are nothing but expressions of myself. And myself is nothing but the full expression of all things. It's a life without limits."[146] As a Zen Master, while following many Zen Masters' ways of thinking, Glassman presents a meaningful metaphor for life: 'the supreme meal' and a Zen cook is a person who knows how to plan, cook, appreciate, serve, and offer the supreme meal of life. According to the principles of Zen cooking, it consists of five main 'courses' or aspects of life: (1) Spirituality; (2) [Composed of] study and learning; (3) Livelihood; (4) [Made out of] social action or change; and (5) Relationship and community. With these five 'courses' Glassman discusses how to create a life that is lived fully and completely.[147]

144 Ibid., 50.

145 Ibid., 49.

146 Bernie Glassman and Rick Fields, *Instructions to the Cook: A Zen Master's Lessons in Living a Life That Matters* (Boston: Shambala Publications, 2013), 3-4.

147 Cf. Ibid., 7.

The first course, or the first aspect of life, spirituality, which consists of spiritual practices, is the centre of all the activities that help to realise the oneness of life. The second course, study, which provides sharpness and intelligence, is never merely abstract, yet it runs parallel with the practices. For Glassman the study of things should be simultaneous with his practice of livelihood, social action, or spirituality. Speaking of the third aspect of life, livelihood, which sustains us in the physical world, Glassman sees taking care of oneself and making a living in the world as necessary for all. With the fourth aspect Glassman asserts that once a person begins to take care of his/her self, he/she becomes aware of the reality of the people around them. This leads to reaching out to the needy, because, as Glassman repeatedly says, we all are inter-connected, we are not separated from one another. The fifth course, the course of relationship and community, emphasises the harmony among all aspects of life. As Glassman says, "[A]ll these courses make the supreme meal of our life … We all need different ingredients, and different amounts, at different times in our lives …. You need to look at your situation and find out how much of each ingredient is needed at any given moment."[148] Without rejecting anything, he emphasises the need of using what is available, how to maintain a balance of ingredients, the need for putting everything in the appropriate order. Finally, he states that our faults are our best ingredients.

3.4.1.3 Being Present to Suffering

"Doing service for others as a spiritual practice is a way to be in the world without separation. In the Buddhist tradition, we call this recognising that everything is an expression of emptiness."[149] In the view of Glassman, the thoughts of a person about how the world should be are separating him/her from the experience of the concrete reality. He therefore emphasises the need of being one with the other without clinging.

Glassman understands awakening in Buddhism to mean: awakening to the experience of inter-connectedness. He calls the energy of inter-connectedness 'love' and this love is much more natural and intrinsic: "it is automatically taking care of other people because we experience them

148 Ibid., 9.

149 Bernie Glassman, "The Buddhist Way of Being Present to Suffering": http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernie-glassman/where-do-find-the-strengt_b_824261.html (accessed 2 July 2015).

as us."[150] When someone awakens to the oneness of life, that person cannot consider the pieces of himself/herself as the other: "when I see everything, including the social system, as myself, I take action to reduce suffering. I heal the system as healing myself, not fixing someone else who is to blame for all the problems."[151]

With all the experience of working as a community in the 'Greyston Family Inn', Glassman established the Zen Peacemaker Order, an order of Zen practitioners dedicated to the cause of peace in 1998, based on the three tenets: not knowing, bearing witness to the joy and suffering of the world and taking actions for healing suffering.

1) Not Knowing

In Glassman's thought the first principle is penetrating into the unknown in order to help practitioners to let go of their fixed ideas: detachment from one's own ideas. As Glassman says, in Zen, *koan* study is the method of trying to let go of one's own ideas.[152] In the process, people are put into a situation where they just do not know what is happening: a social *koan*. In Zen it is *shikantaza*, which means to have no idea: "you've got to let go of your particular ideas and what's left is just that space of not knowing."[153]

When Glassman works with the homeless, he works with his students and practitioners who are asked to forget all the conventions they know. It does not mean that they throw out what they know, but what Glassman tries to highlight is the importance of entering the situation with the mind-set that you have no idea how to take care of it. As Christopher Queen

150 Bernie Glassman, "The Buddhist way of Being Present to Suffering": http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernie-glassman/where-do-find-the-strengt_b_824261.html (accessed 2 July 2015).

151 Bernie Glassman, "The Buddhist way of Being Present to Suffering": http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernie-glassman/where-do-find-the-strengt_b_824261.html (accessed 2 July 2015).

152 A *koan* is more commonly understood as a tool for reaching true insight. In the Rinzai Zen 'koan study' is the symbiosis of *koan* and *zazen* (meditational practice) as a means to self-realisation. See Eido T. Shimano, "Zen Loan," in *Zen: Tradition and Transition: A Sourcebook by Contemporary Zen Masters and Scholars*, ed. Kenneth Kraft (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 70.

153 Bernard Glassman, "Bernie Glassman's Excellent Adventure": http://www.lionsroar.com/bernie-glassmans-excellent-adventure/# (accessed 14 June 2105).

explains, "[I]t [not knowing] is a kind of methodological agnosticism – not a total renunciation of cognition and understanding, but a strategic bracketing of formal knowledge and prejudgment."[154] In this way of understanding the Buddhist agnosticism, one is aware not to become attached to anything no matter what doctrine one is taught to believe in. For Glassman this is the meaning of peace-making: "it's about living a questioning life, a life of unknowing. If we are ready to live such a life, without fixed ideas or answers, then we are ready to bear witness to every situation, no matter how difficult, offensive, or painful it is."[155] In his view, when someone starts from unknowing, all the acquired knowledge will come out spontaneously to be used in a creative way.

2) Bearing Witness to the Joy and Suffering of the World

The second principle is bearing witness: sit with the situation, bear witness to it. "Bearing witness means to have a relationship. I wanted to have a relationship with Letten [Zurich drug park] and all its inhabitants, as I subsequently wished to have a relationship with Auschwitz and all its inhabitants, as I try to do with the places where we sit during street retreats and all their inhabitants."[156] This 'bearing witness' began in 1996. He journeyed with a group of people to Auschwitz, the Nazi concentration camp where millions of Jews were exterminated, to bear witness to the suffering of the people in the past and the present.

> Hitler and Nazi Germany had been determined to stamp out differences. They had defiled one race and one culture, declared all others inferior, and selected some to be exterminated. I was determined to bring people from different religions and nationalities to the very place where diversity had once been condemned to a terrible grave. There we would bear witness to our differences. Out of that a healing would arise.[157]

Glassman relates that at the end of the retreat it had become a one people event. This is what Hitler also wanted, says Glassman, but the difference is that his way of doing it was to eliminate diversity and he could not do it, because what people ultimately have in common is that they

154 Christopher S. Queen, "Glassman Roshi and the Peacemaker Order: Three Encounters," 101.

155 Bernie Glassman, *Bearing Witness*, xiv.

156 Ibid., 97.

157 Ibid., 18.

are different. Therefore, once a person sees and accepts that everything is different he/she begins to see the oneness of life: "[T]rying to find oneness without accepting these differences can take us on an endless quest that leads nowhere except to tremendous suffering."[158]

Glassman feels that wherever there is great pain there is also the potential for enormous transformation. Whatever ideas people have of what is going to happen when they go to bear witness to the situation, they learn from the unknown. Those who bear witness will experience something that is closer to that situation than those who have not been there to experience reality. According to Glassman, many social activists often do not know what it is like to live in the situations they seek to improve or eliminate. It is therefore important to have direct experience of suffering while helping or empowering the people. This was the main reason for Glassman to begin street retreats: living on the streets for one week to experience homelessness. When the street retreatants are pushed into the unknown, they are forced to be more observant of themselves and their surroundings. From this increased awareness, healing takes place. Glassman claims that when privileged people experience street retreats, they come to the realisation of how attached they are to things that control their lives. When an interviewer raised a question, asking what he teaches at Auschwitz, he replied:

> Nothing. I am not the teacher there. Auschwitz is the teacher. It's an amazing teacher. I'm always seeking places to learn. Many times, I invite people to do the trip with me. Maybe they'll learn something, too. I try to bring us into a situation in which there is almost no way *not* to learn. This plunges us into the state of not-knowing and then we can bear witness to the joy and suffering of the world.[159]

Glassman explains that there is a part of us that allows all human beings to dehumanise people. Therefore, the first way to deal with this aspect of dehumanisation is remembering, which is the opposite of dismembering. The other way is to recognise whom people exclude and to invite them in, which is the most difficult aspect of the process. Being

158 Ibid., 41.

159 Bernard Glassman, "Buddhism, Reconciliation and Auschwitz: An Interview with Zen Master Bernie Glassman": http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/14/buddhism-reconciliation-a_n_646879.html (accessed 14 June 2015).

aware that some may not agree with the spirit of seeing the oneness of the *dhamma* world and social action, he distanced himself from this duality: *dhamma* world and social action need to be separated. Glassman affirmed however that, in practice, they are one and the same.

3) Taking Action for Healing Suffering

The third principle, healing oneself and the world, is the result of the above mentioned first two principles: not knowing and bearing witness. This is the *mettā* or loving action step. In healing the world, Glassman says, the first step is to go where the wound is. It is useless saying things without taking any action in order to achieve the solution.

While following these three principles and through his experience of working with different situations in life and society in particular, Glassman adopted four points that many religions might agree on: (1) Commitment to a culture of non-violence and reverence for life; (2) Solidarity and a just economic order; (3) Tolerance and a life based on truthfulness; and (4) Equal rights and partnership between men and women.[160] His wish is to see many communities in the world supporting each other in what they are doing in their societies. The Ten Precepts of this Zen Peacemaker show the path to achieve this goal of supporting each other.

Glassman claims that his three principles invite us to be intimate with suffering in the life of the world. Hence, he affirms the notion that the Buddha taught, that is, when a person is in a difficult situation, the most important thing that has to be done is to take care of this person.

> We all have the illusion that 'something is not part of me.' If I cut my hand and it starts to bleed, I could get angry at it – it's messing up my new clothes. But it is a metaphor for life. It's easy to get angry at those people who are screwing me up and messing me up. But if this is me, and it's bleeding, I take care of it. I don't join a discussion group or wait for the right equipment or wait until I am enlightened or go off to get trained. I immediately get some rags to stop the bleeding, because it's me that's bleeding.[161]

160 Cf. Bernard Glassman, "Bernie Glassman's Excellent Adventure": http://www.lionsroar.com/bernie-glassmans-excellent-adventure/ (accessed 14 June 2105).

161 Bernie Glassman, as quoted by Christopher S. Queen, "Glassman Roshi and the Peacemaker Order: Three Encounters,"107.

3.5 Summary

Bernard Glassman, a Zen Master and engaged Buddhist leader who committed himself to the spiritual practice of being with others, presented some key facts to understand the reality of suffering in society. Being rooted in the tradition of Zen Buddhism, he emphasises the teachings of unknowing, non-judgementalism, non-separation, and bearing witness. Bearing all these ideas in his mind, he recognises the world as 'One Body'. He developed the Buddhist teaching of inter-connectedness and inter-dependence among all beings and non-beings.

Paying attention to some of the Zen Buddhist teachings from his perspective, it was clear how he had been influenced by the Zen Buddhist teachings when he created three basic tenets of the Zen Peacemaker Order. In his broader view of the reflection on 'One Body' and inter-connectedness, he highlights some significant points in the relationship between self and other. While considering everyone and everything as a part of his life, Glassman affirms the need for being one with them. Glassman claims that the only way to reach the other person is to abandon one's own thoughts and beliefs regarding the person who is suffering. He repeatedly mentions the importance of seeing reality as it is. For this, he states, all the practitioners have to develop mindfulness training, which gives strength to be present in the moment without any judgement.

Glassman claims that those who reach out to the suffering and the poor have to learn many things from them as those that suffer have much to teach from their life experience and understandings. He considered it to be essential for his practitioners as well as for himself to broaden their views on suffering people, while in the process of bearing witness. For Glassman, this is the meaning of mutual inter-dependence.

Final Reflection

One of the major points in the philosophy of these Buddhist thinkers – Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa and Bernard Glassman – is the denial of the notion that Buddhism has nothing to say about and nothing to contribute in response to the changes and challenges in contemporary society. They claim that Buddhism is irrelevant if it patches up people's psychological and spiritual wounds and sends them back out into the fray.[162] Hence, what

162 Cf. Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism: Dimensions of Asian Spirituality* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 3.

is apparent in the philosophy of these three engaged Buddhists is, that by grounding themselves within classical Buddhism or Buddhist tradition, in other words, by relating to the Buddhist tradition self-consciously, they show how the teaching of Buddhism could be applied in new ways to the complexities of contemporary society. By doing so, they envision and live a meaningful Buddhist life as a way of responding to the suffering of beings in the universe.

The deep reflections of these three engaged Buddhists on the Four Noble Truths made it clear that they root themselves in the Noble Teachings of the Buddha for their engagement to eliminate suffering in society. Instead of focusing only on the personal and spiritual aspect of suffering, they also focus on all kinds of suffering in society as a point of their engagement. The three Buddhist thinkers affirm that suffering is not an isolated fact in complicated contemporary societies as it is inter-connected with the social, economic, political, religious and educational spheres. They also agree on the issue that the traditional understanding of the cause/s of suffering – hatred and ignorance – has to be viewed in a broader way. They do not limit the existing suffering of the world to a result of the previous lives of individuals, and emphasise the importance of rethinking the Buddhist doctrine of *kamma.* Paying attention to the dominant notions of *kamma*, its interpretation of blaming the victim and implying passivity, these three thinkers focus on the present and future dimensions while rejecting the fatalistic aspect of *kamma*. They respond to the present suffering with compassion.

With regard to the Five Lay Precepts, all three Buddhist thinkers put all the Buddhist ideals into practical action through their writings, teachings, practices and involvements in order to affirm the basic ethics of Buddhism, such as, inter-dependence, non-judgementalism and non-adversariality. In Buddhism the philosophical notion of 'no-permanent Soul' – free of egoism – was very much connected to the Buddhist value of selflessness. This thinking leads to overcoming duality, and human-made separateness among beings and things in the universe. As discussed, all these thinkers emphasise the avoidance of a judgemental attitude towards the 'other' – which could be the oppressor or a superior party. Instead of taking sides, they adopt a radical acceptance of all persons. This is the fundamental principle that inspired Nhat Hanh to opt for the 'Third way' instead of siding with the communists or the American-backed oppressive

regime. It is also the same principle that motivated Glassman's inclusive approach to the suffering and the poor without any judgement or separation as he considers everyone as One Body.

One of the key elements in engaged Buddhism is its approach to non-violence. All these engaged Buddhist thinkers emphasise the importance of cultivating mindfulness, as they consider there to be a great connection between personal spiritual growth and social activism. They are like two sides of the same coin. Compassion and wisdom, the root elements of engaged Buddhism, can only be cultivated through meditation and mindfulness. They do not ignore the traditional Buddhist spirituality; instead they base their social vision on traditional Buddhist spirituality, because they are very much aware of the difference between the essential Buddhist spirituality and the institutionalised teachings and rituals.

Even though each thinker comes from a particular Buddhist tradition, while appreciating the positive aspects of other traditions, they learn from one another and apply what is relevant to their context, regardless of which tradition the teaching is highlighting. All three thinkers took this vow as a core commitment to their social engagement. They do not consider engaged Buddhism to be a separate school of Buddhism. They moved beyond their own religious traditions and geographical backgrounds to see the importance of having an inter-religious dialogue with other religions.

In Buddhism the goal is the attainment of liberation: liberation from the wheel of *saṃsāra*. These three engaged Buddhists, being aware of the spiritual goals in Buddhism, focus on liberation not only from the wheel of *saṃsāra*, but also from *dukkha* in all spheres and on the perfection of wisdom and compassion.

The philosophical reflections on suffering of these three engaged Buddhist thinkers do not sufficiently engage with the suffering generated by male domination in patriarchal social structures. That is not to say that they do not speak about the issue, yet they do not consider it to be a major issue and focus on other oppressive social, economic, political issues in their discussions. Many Buddhist feminist thinkers, however, do raise the matter of suffering created by male domination. The next effort of this study is therefore to broaden out the discussion on suffering in Buddhism by including the perspectives of three Buddhist feminist thinkers: *bhikkhuṇī* Dhammanandā, *bhikkhuṇī* Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Rita Mary Gross.

III. The Buddhist Feminist Critique on Suffering

Introduction

The Buddha realised that there is suffering common to all: man and woman, young and old, rich and poor. Every being born into this world suffers, mainly from birth, sickness, old age and death. The wheel of human life and death is kept turning by greed, hatred and stupidity. No one can escape from this reality whatever the position he/she holds in society. As suffering is common to all beings, the Buddha affirmed the equal spiritual potential to end suffering for both women and men, which was radical in the Indian context during the time of the Buddha.[163]

Buddhism is a major religion in which women's ordination was permitted, and which affirmed the spiritual potential of women to achieve enlightenment. Nevertheless, this egalitarian theory has always been contradictory to practice, because women are suffering due to marginalisation, dehumanisation and oppression in Buddhist societies both in their lay and monastic lives due to misogynist systems. Traditional Buddhism relies heavily on its monastic institutions that are characterised by male dominance, male monopoly, and a misogynistic view of women.

Almost all Buddhist societies have the idea that women are born due to their previous bad *kamma* and as a result, they deserve the terrible suffering that they undergo in families, on the work place and in society. A deeper study of Buddhism examines how women throughout history and up and until the present day have been and are struggling to overcome their suffering while moving beyond the prevailing social, religious, and cultural barriers.

The third part of the present chapter will discuss suffering from the perspectives of three Buddhist feminist thinkers: *bhikkhuṇī* Dhammanandā, *bhikkhuṇī* Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Rita Mary Gross.

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163 A study of the position of women in pre-Buddhist India in *Ṛndia*, the earliest literature of the Indo-Aryans, shows that women held an honourable place in early Indian society. When the priestly Brahmin caste began to dominate society, the downward trend in the position of women began. It is therefore important to understand that this was the social background in which Buddhism flourished. See Lorna Dewaraja, "Buddhist Women in India and Pre-Colonial Sri Lanka," in *Buddhist Women across Cultures,* ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 68.

1. The Power of Naming the Marginalisation of Women: Dhammanandā

1.1 A Biographical Sketch of Dhammanandā

> My message is this: number one, the way out is possible; number two, you have to start; number three, you have to start now because everyone is waiting for everyone else to start, so it never gets started. You can do it. [164]

Dhammanandā is a remarkable woman who opened a new chapter in Buddhism for Thailand having made a great challenge to the existing patriarchal domination of Buddhist monks over women. Dhammanandā is a Buddhist scholar, an author, an activist in the field of social justice and women's issues, and especially, a leading campaigner for the full ordination of women. She became the first fully ordained Theravāda *bhikkhuṇī* in Thailand.

Chatsumarn Kabilsingh who later became a *bhikkhuṇī* with the name Dhammanandā, was born in 1944. Her mother, Voramai Kabilsingh, was the first Thai woman to be fully ordained as a *bhikkhuṇī* in the Mahayana tradition; her father, Kokiat Shatsena, was a politician. When she was ten years old, her mother became a Buddhist nun, but the significant fact is that rather than leaving the home, as many men and women do, her mother turned her home into a temple. Recalling her past days, Dhammanandā relates that she and her mother were not supported by her father: "[I]f my mother had left us I would have been a street kid. So instead she [mother] turned the house into a temple."[165] Dhammanandā thus grew up in a kind of religious atmosphere and even received Buddhist instruction and training along with other nuns.

As Dhammanandā recalls, "we [Dhammanandā with her mother] slept together on a cotton mat. I would fall asleep watching her writing. That is my first picture of my mother, always a writer."[166] Since her mother

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164 Dhammananda, "From TV to Temple: Female Buddhist Monk Walks a Pioneering Path," interview by Sally Sara: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-03-28/mama-asia-thailand/4599176 (accessed 19 May 2015).

165 Dhammananda, "From TV to Temple: Female Buddhist Monk Walks a Pioneering Path," interview by Sally Sara: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-03-28/mama-asia-thailand/4599176 (accessed 19 May 2015).

166 Dhammananda, "From TV to Temple: Female Buddhist Monk Walks a Pioneering Path," interview by Sally Sara: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-03-28/mama-asia-thailand/4599176 (accessed 19 May 2015).

was an educated woman the influence of home led Dhammanandā to do her higher studies in Buddhism in India and Canada. After her studies, she became a high profile academic and taught at two leading universities in Thailand and Canada for over thirty years. One of the main turning points in her life was marked while she was attending a conference in 1983, where many feminists from different parts of the world gathered together to discuss the issues of women. During the conference, Dhammanandā became aware of two points and the following are her own words: (1) "we have to stand up for what is right, but not to the point of being angry. This forced me to understand what it means to be Buddhist"; and (2) – the second realisation was more personal – "being the only academic in Thailand who knows the ins and outs of ordination for women, but not doing anything to bring about social change, is a real shame."[167] Once she realised this, in 1984, she became an activist and along with her academic career as a professor, she began to write books and letters to address Buddhist women in different parts of the world. Dhammanandā claims that "[I]f women are not agents of social change, society cannot change."[168] She was also the co-founder of Sakyadhita, the first International Buddhist women's conference and its president from 1991 to 2005.

The year 2000 was a remarkable year in the life of Dhammanandā, who was then a wife and a mother of three sons. After explaining her decision to become a Buddhist nun, she divorced her husband and also took early retirement from the university where she lectured, in order to take the first step towards her ordination. Contrary to the situation of women in the Thai social context, she decided what was meaningful for herself, as she says, "my husband was not angry but confused maybe. I think the time had come where I had to choose my life, what was meaningful for me."[169]

Since women's ordination is not accepted in Thailand, no monk is permitted to ordain any woman. Hence, Dhammanandā came to SL in

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167 Dhammananda, "Robe Model": http://www.thailandtatler.com/tag/chatsumarn-kabilsingh/ (accessed 16 May 2015).

168 Dhammananda, "Robe Model": http://www.thailandtatler.com/tag/chatsumarn-kabilsingh/ (accessed 16 May 2015).

169 Dhammananda, "From TV to Temple: Female Buddhist Monk Walks a Pioneering Path," interview by SallySara: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-03-28/mama-asia-thailand/4599176 (accessed 19 May 2015).

2001 to take lower ordination, and after two years, she was ordained a full *bhikkhuṇī,* also in SL.[170] On the one hand her decision to seek ordination was/is a controversial issue among many Buddhist conservative leaders and lay people. On the other hand, her brave decision to go beyond the oppressive patriarchal, hierarchical Buddhist institution in Thailand was highly praised by those who desired and worked for the equal dignity of women and men. She claims, "[I] knew exactly what I was doing so I never wavered when people said something. There was not one single monk who would tell me in front of my face. So I said, anyone who speaks behind my back, that is considered unsaid. You have to come and speak to my face, then I will explain to you."[171] Dhammanandā now lives in the temple built by her mother: *Songdhammakalyani*, 'temple where women uphold the *dhamma*'. It is the first women's temple built by women in Thailand and has been a home to many uneducated monks and nuns since her mother's time.

1.2 Basic Characteristics of Dhammanandā's Philosophical Method

In a sense, Dhammanandā's approach is global. She goes beyond her own Thai society and her own Buddhist tradition in order to collaborate with wider society where all inter-religious and inter-cultural ideas are evaluated. She often highlighted the unity of the Buddhist schools: "if each school is serious about Buddhist principles, we should realise that before we are Mahayana, Theravāda, or Vajrayana, we are Buddhists."[172] Her approach is also at a grassroots level. She states the importance of working at the grassroots in order to talk at the level of most people's understanding. She is aware that many women in her country still lack education, especially Buddhist education. These women are not prepared to challenge the harmful structures of social and religious milieus, hence Dhammanandā sees the necessity of the approach at the grassroots level.

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170 Dhammanandā obtained her ordination in SL, but the fact remains that neither some *saṅgha* nor some members of the Sri Lankan government recognised it.

171 Dhammananda, "From TV to Temple: Female Buddhist Monk Walks a Pioneering Path," interview by Sally Sara: http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-03-28/mama-asia-thailand/4599176 (accessed 19 May 2015).

172 Dhammananda, "Institutional Authority: A Buddhist Perspective," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 30 (2010): 156.

1.3 The Philosophical Conceptualisation of Dhammanandā

As a laywoman and today as an ordained woman in Thai Buddhist patriarchal society, Dhammanandā observes that many Buddhist women have been silenced, marginalised and discriminated against by the hierarchical order of monks. Due to a lack of knowledge about Buddhism and (even though some may know what is happening in Buddhist institutions) due to the respect for monks or fear of challenging them, many Thai people keep silent in the midst of oppression of the laity, especially women.

Much of Dhammanandā's work and teachings affirm the dignity of women. She claims that there is no difference between the dignity of women and men in accordance with the *dhamma* taught by the Buddha. Well aware of the fact that Buddhist women have been strategically left out by patriarchal monks in their writings, by misinterpretations and by oppressive laws and regulations of the mainstream of Buddhist tradition, she speaks about the importance of purification of the *saṅgha*, re-examination of the Buddhist texts and unification of Buddhist women in order to empower women in Buddhist society.

1.4 Dhammanandā's Understanding of Suffering

In the view of Dhammanandā, patriarchal biases and the attempt to monopolise Buddhism are expressions of ignorance, which is the root cause of suffering according to Buddhism. Based on the teachings of the Buddha, she articulates the reality of suffering, especially the suffering of women in Thai society who are in many ways marginalised in society.

1.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

1.4.1.1 The Position and Problems of Thai Women in Buddhism

For Dhammanandā, the cultural and social roles that are assigned to women in Thai society reflect the problems of Thai women and the gender inequality that is ingrained in Thai Buddhist society. In her work, *Thai Women in Buddhism*, which was published even before her ordination, Dhammanandā notes that the general perception of Thai society is that women do not have critical and intellectual capacities. Thai women, despite the reality that they have always worked side by side with men,

are the 'weaker sex', or flowers of the world whose main role was to serve and please men.[173] Since society has had negative impressions of women historically, she notes that it has become a major cause for limiting women's rights in education and in independent critical thought. Women were trained and educated as good housewives in their roles of wife and mother. The limited access to education, especially studies in Buddhism, has had an enormous impact on women in Thai society. The centre for education was the temple and monks were not allowed to have direct contact with women; therefore, they taught only male students. The other major factor was that Buddhist texts were not available for lay people until very recent times, says Dhammanandā.[174]

With regard to Thai women and the law, Dhammanandā asserts that early Thai law was influenced by Brahmins, whose attitude toward women was harsh. They put women down through rituals and customs for being women. Women's participation in economic responsibility is very high in Thai society – both rural and urban – as many women also work side by side with men. Yet Thai women do not have real economic power like their male partners have. Modernisation, Dhammanandā says, has come at a high price and has severe implications for Thai society, especially for Thai women. Women have to struggle due to low wages and employment discrimination, and eventually many of them end up in the sex industry: prostitution.[175]

Dhammanandā asserts that in the midst of extreme social discrimination against women, the Buddha opened the doors for the full participation of women through the admission of the order of nuns, but in Thailand women are not allowed to enter into the order of nuns and the reason that the *saṅgha* gives is that it is against the *Dhamma Vinaya*: an order dating from 1928 and given by a former *Sangharaja*, a senior monk

173 Cf. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), 13.

174 The situation of women in royal families and of high social status was to some extent different from the common women in Thai society, as the former had the opportunity to study, as did men.

175 Cf. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, "A Vision of Dharmic Society: A Buddhist Woman's Perspective": http://www.inebnetwork.org/thinksangha/tsangha/chatsumarndsbook.html (accessed 17 May 2015).

who is the so-called head, forbidding Thai monks to give ordination to women.[176]

Apart from a few exceptions, Dhammanandā says, the dominant belief of Thai society is that a woman's place is in the home, under the rule and 'protection' of her husband or any other male member of her family, and looking after the children. The exploitation, oppression and marginalisation of Thai women by social, cultural, economic, academic and political structures, have been justified on the basis of *kamma*. Women have therefore passively accepted their suffering as the expression of religious principles.[177] The position and problems of women in Thai society thus have their main roots in the main religious institution: the Buddhist 'institution'. The monopolisation of Buddhism in the hands of Buddhist monks is a drastic issue in Thai society.

1.4.1.2 The Obstacles Placed before Women on the Buddhist Path

Dhammanandā claims that the Buddha made it clear that his teaching was handed down to four groups of Buddhists, namely, monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen and together these groups share the responsibility to build a healthy Buddhist society. In Thai society, Buddhist monks have the religious monopoly, which was totally against the vision of the Buddha. Dhammanandā therefore points out that "[P]atriarchal biases and

176 In Thailand, the absolute power of the monks rests with the head of the Council of Elders, a group of senior monks and is often seen as ineffectual, archaic and patriarchal, which is very much contradictory to the spirit of Buddhism. The Buddha did not want to appoint anyone to hold a position of complete authority. The rule of the Theravāda tradition is that a woman must first be ordained by five nuns, followed by five monks. Basically the rule, which was a later addition by the Buddha, was established due to a practical issue. But the problem is that there were no nuns in Thailand as the nuns' lineage was dead for several years. Dhammanandā's argument is that this does not mean that women's ordination should be prohibited in Thailand. It is important to remember that monastic rules came into existence only when specific problems arose in the community, and the Buddha did not expect anyone to be strict about the rules while neglecting his *dhammas*. In Thailand, women are allowed to become *mae jis*, who wear white robes and take precepts to live spiritual lives. Their role in the temple is cleaning and cooking for the monks. This is precisely what monks expect from women, even though they are interested in a higher spiritual goal.

177 Cf. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism*, 16.

the attempt to monopolise Buddhism, to limit its perspective to only the experience of one gender, is an expression of ignorance. And ignorance, Buddhism teaches, is the root cause of suffering."[178]

There are ample examples within the Buddhist canon of many men and women who were really interested in following the spiritual path, even during the time of the Buddha and who attained total liberation. The potential of women to express a genuine commitment to practise the path has, however, been restricted throughout history by the Buddhist monks in many Buddhist societies. With regard to this, Dhammanandā underlines the importance of analysing the Buddhist texts from a feminist perspective. In her deeper view, she recognises three main reasons for the obstacles placed before women on the Buddhist path.

In Dhammanandā's view, the first reason is based on the First Council of the *saṅgha,* held three months after the death of the Buddha, with the participation of five hundred enlightened men.[179] In her studies on the First Council, Dhammanandā points out three important facts about the council that regard women. Firstly, although there were a number of enlightened *bhikkhunī-s*, who were highly praised by the Buddha for their knowledge, skills, wisdom and spiritual power, none of them were invited to the Council. Secondly, Ananda, one of the faithful disciples of the Buddha, who spoke to the Buddha with regard to the issue of women's ordination was accused by the other monks of having committed an 'offense' by encouraging the Buddha to accept women into the order. While highlighting these two main points, Dhammanandā notes that the *arahant-s* in the First Council strongly opposed the establishment of the *bhikkhuṇī saṅgha* [the order of the ordained Buddhist women], even though they kept silent when the Buddha was with them.[180] Thirdly, in the view of Dhammanandā, Maha Kassapa, who presided over this historic council, was not on good terms with the nuns, as they were interested in Ananda's teachings rather than his.[181]

178 Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, "A Vision of Dharmic Society: A Buddhist Woman's Perspective": http://www.inebnetwork.org/thinksangha/tsangha/chatsumarndsbook.html (accessed 17 May 2015).

179 The *Tipiṭaka*, three baskets of the teachings had not been formed by that time and the teachings agreed upon at this council were preserved through oral transmission, not as written form.

180 Cf. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism*, 23-24.

181 Cf. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Women in Buddhism: Questions and Answers* (Bangkok: Buddha Dharma Association, 1998), 30.

Dhammanandā's second reason is based on the issue of the Buddhist texts that were first written down at least three hundred years after the death of the Buddha. Firstly, these texts were believed to have been preserved in Pāli, which was not the dialect of the Buddha and it is still questionable whether Pāli was even a spoken language. Secondly, the canon was written down at a later council held in SL, thousands of miles away from its origin. Thirdly, these texts were recorded by monks drawn from an Indian social and cultural background, and not necessarily by enlightened monks. Even if the texts were written by enlightened monks, Dhammanandā says, there would be suspicion as to the biased nature of the enlightened monks concerned at the Council. Due to all these reasons, Dhammanandā is of the opinion that "the authenticity of the Pāli canon as the actual words of the Buddha cannot be accepted without question, given these differences in time, language, and location."[182]

In speaking about the thirt reason, Dhammanandā distinguishes two levels of teaching in the tradition. Firstly, the core teaching of the Buddha that directly deals with the spiritual path. Secondly, the teaching on a more mundane level, which is indeed affected by the social context. The first level of teaching is free from contextual and gender bias as the highest goal of Buddhism is available to all sentient beings. The latter is somewhat controversial as there is room for variations due to the tendency to add the colour of cultural and social contexts throughout history.[183] Dhammanandā states that all the records of the Buddhist texts have been taken literally without any analysis and as a result women are looked down upon by men and considered to be a hindrance to spiritual development, especially for the Buddhist monks.

Suffering is not an isolated issue; rather it is connected with different kinds of negative attitudes, beliefs and myths about women. Dhammanandā claims that unless the discrimination against women in Buddhism is addressed, it is pointless to speak about how to alleviate the suffering of women in Thai society. She expresses the need of unlearning all teachings, beliefs and myths that marginalise people in the community, as well as the need to re-establish the teachings that generate equality and peace within the community.

182 Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism*, 23.

183 Cf. Ibid., 24.

1.4.1.3 Developing an Unlearning Process to Transcend Suffering of Women

Dhammanandā is conscious of the fact that in many societies women are silenced by men out of fear, because they perceive women as a threat. Significant numbers of men in many societies are inclined to blame women for their sexual temptations instead of taking responsibility by controlling their fantasies. Moreover, blaming women usually implies that it is 'natural' to pursue women to the point of coercion or cruelty.

Firstly, Dhammanandā speaks about the biased approach in the existing Buddhist teaching. For example, many Buddhist monks highlight the saying of the Buddha: 'nothing binds men as strongly as women', to justify the status accorded to women in a Buddhist society. In the same verse Buddha also warned women, but since the teaching has been predominantly handed down by male monks, the story of women has been hidden or not revealed. Dhammanandā therefore asserts the importance of investigating these concealed sources of her tradition in order to overcome negative attitudes toward women.

Secondly, Dhammanandā states that unless Buddhist society is ready to accept that certain passages of the Canon clearly bear the Indian social and cultural values that were highly influenced by Brahmanism, no one can change wrong ideologies perpetuated against women. In view of this she points out that 'women are subjected to five woes' according to the teachings of Manu *Dharmaśāstra*: women must leave their family at marriage, women must suffer the pain of menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth and they must work hard taking care of their husbands. Practically speaking, it is very common in Thai society for a husband to live with his new wife's family, which implies that the teaching *Dharmaśāstra* does not apply for many women in Thai society. Moreover, menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth are characterised negatively, reflecting male biases, fear and misunderstanding. Hence, what Dhammanandā tries to show is how the influence of the patriarchal culture of India is concealed in many Buddhist teachings.

Thirdly, speaking of the idea that 'a woman cannot become a Buddha', Dhammanandā says that this statement has been added at least five hundred years after the Buddha's death.[184] This has been demonstrated

184 Cf. Ibid., 53.

by the Japanese Buddhist scholar Kajiyama Yuichi to originate from a later tradition in the Canon.[185] Dhammanandā further notes that the 'thirty two physical marks' (*mahāpurisalakkhaṇa*), which refer to the general characteristics of Buddha's physical body, as discussed by Kajiyama Yuichi, is often referred to by patriarchal authority to exclude women from the Buddhist spiritual path: The tenth characteristic of Buddha is 'concealed genital' or 'well-retracted male organ'. For Dhammanandā, "an enlightened person is no longer at the mercy of sensual appetites," yet, these later ideas are misinterpretations that fail to recognise women's spiritual potential.[186]

Fourthly, Dhammanandā openly discusses the reason behind the Buddha's hesitation to allow women to join the *saṅgha*. She suggests that the Buddha, coming from the Indian context, may have been sensitive to the existing social stratification of the Indian society. Her argument is that the Buddha therefore did not offer clear reasons for his reluctance to ordain women. Being a Buddha he might have given it a lot of consideration; he did not think women were less capable and his reluctance cannot be interpreted negatively to mean that the Buddha did not recognise women's spiritual potential. The Buddhist texts further affirm that after admitting women into the *saṅgha*, the Buddha gave an additional set of eight special rules (*Gurudharma*).

> We must take into consideration the historical and cultural context that conditioned the formation of the Buddhist Sangha. The Bhikku Sangha had already been firmly established before the idea was raised of having a women's order. The acceptance of women into the Sangha required adjustments that were not always willingly accepted. In order to facilitate their acceptance into the order, the Buddha needed to assure the bhikkus that they had nothing to lose by the admission of women. The bhikkuni Sangha was thus required to adopt the *Gurudharma* which placed them in a subordinant position to the bhikkus.[187]

Dhammanandā emphasises that the *Gurudharmas*, like all Buddhist teachings, should be viewed as *guidelines* rather than *rules* cast in iron to be followed blindly.

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185 Cf. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism*, 26.

186 Cf. Ibid., 27.

187 Ibid., 29.

The fifth issue in the reflection of Dhammanandā is that Thai beliefs and customs reinforce the negative perception of women, with some of them based on Buddhist teachings. One of the major claims is the view that 'women are born from their bad *kamma*' and 'are of lower birth'.[188] As a result, many have the idea that to be born a male is better than being born a female, says Dhammanandā. A man can receive ordination, the highest form of merit making, but not a woman. In the view of Dhammanandā, women who are born into this kind of tradition mostly lack a critical mind to think beyond what they see and hear. Dhammanandā asserts that, "the belief that one's gender is the result of 'bad karma' does not hold any meaning."[189] Yet, ironically, many monks, whose principal source of support are laywomen, claim that women have been born due to their bad *kamma*. In Thai society, Dhammanandā says, the mothers whose sons are ordained think that they reap the highest merit as they have given their sons to the temple. In some families, mostly with the consent of the parents, the eldest daughters work in Bangkok in the sex industry in order to financially support the expenses of the ordination of their younger brothers: "the merit men make by being ordained is gained at the cost of exploiting women's dignity."[190]

The sixth point that Dhammanandā brings to the fore is the notion of considering women as 'unclean'. In Thailand, women are not allowed circumambulation of *thūpa* or to enter the main hall of the temple, as they are considered unclean. The monks usually explain that a woman who is in an unclean state due to menstruation is not allowed to circumambulate the *thūpa*: this often results from the monk's inability to explain the myths of menstruation.

Dhammanandā points out the importance of going back to the Buddhist sources to search for hidden passages that may unravel the truth about negative beliefs towards women. Unlike in early times, today, education in Buddhist studies is available to both men and women, and even the sources are available in their own languages. Dhammanandā

188 Cf. Ibid., 31.

189 Ibid., 31.

190 Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, "A Vision of Dharmic Society: A Buddhist Woman's Perspective": http://www.inebnetwork.org/thinksangha/tsangha/chatsumarndsbook.html (accessed 17 May 2015).

hopes that unearthing the hidden texts can lead both men and women to overcome their negative attitudes. By doing so they will be able to bring an end to the untold suffering of the marginalised, and especially help to develop the self-esteem of women.

1.4.1.4 Generating 'Positive Energy' to Overcome Suffering in Society

From Dhammanandā's perspective, positive energy means, "feeling positive in your work, feeling positive about your life, and feeling happy about being. Women must feel positive about being women."[191] She builds this energy through her grassroots and scholarly works. To access the depth of this creative energy, argues Dhammanandā, we must return to the sources of our Buddhist tradition, especially to the message of the Buddha, where we learn to annihilate suffering and attain liberation. Dhammanandā highlights two important reasons for such an exercise.

Firstly, the teaching of the Buddha. Dhammanandā values the teaching of the Buddha who stated that men and women have equal spiritual potential. For her, this was the most significant teaching on women and for women in Buddhist texts. In her view the Buddha's claim regarding the equality of women and men and his recognition of the spiritual potential of both women and men is revolutionary considering the context in which he lived: patriarchal and Brahminical: "He [the Buddha] denied the social structures of his time. This was very revolutionary. To be a revolutionary is to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha."[192] The *Therīgāthā*, a canonical text recorded lives of the thousands of women who lived in the time of the Buddha, both lay women and ordained women. Her belief is that contrary to the Thai people's mentality, in a true Buddhist society the birth of a boy or a girl can make no difference.[193]

Secondly, Dhammanandā highlights the four main parts of the Buddhist community, namely; lay women, lay men, ordained women and ordained men. She holds the idea that the growth or the decline of

191 Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, "Helping the Daughters of the Buddha" interview by Share International: http://www.shareintl.org/archives/social-justice/sj_mlhelping.htm (accessed 19 May 2015).

192 Dhammananda, "Ven. Bhikkuni Dhammananda": http://www.npf.or.jp/english/peace_prize/nppc/the_committee_members/ven_dhammananda_bhikkhuni.html (accessed 19 May 2015).

193 Cf. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism*, 33.

Buddhism depends on the contribution of all these groups. There cannot be a true Buddhist community while neglecting any group of the religious community.[194]

Even though Dhammanandā does not hold on to the idea that discrimination against women in Buddhist society is the only reason for the suffering of women, she considers it one of the major reasons that underpins other political, social, cultural and economic violations of women. As discussed in the beginning, education, law, the economy, politics and many other areas in Thai society are intermingled with the Buddhist institution. As "Buddhism cannot really blossom if half of the world's population is not given its full right to express its religious commitment,"[195] the full participation of women is needed, especially in the religious field, where they can express themselves as equally as men.

> We are living in a world full of crisis. We are being hypocritical about many things. When we have so many crises facing us, how can we say: 'you are a woman, don't do that, it's only for men.' Why can't men and women help each other so that we can have a better society, live in a better world, and enter the new century in a better fashion.[196]

1.5 Summary

In the view of Dhammanandā, the four basic divisions of a Buddhist religious community – lay men, lay women, nuns and monks – assert the equal responsibility of all the followers of the Buddha, regardless of gender and caste. They are: (1) The members of the community who have studied and understand the teaching of the Buddha; (2) They put the teaching into practice; and (3) They are able to defend and explain the teaching correctly.[197] Being aware of her responsibility in the Buddhist community, following the footsteps of Mahaprajapati – Dhammanandā's role model – she played and plays a challenging role in Thai society. She addresses unjust structures that negatively affect women, in order to affirm the dignity of marginalised women in society. She gave an example of how to read history from the perspective of women and how to value the

194 Cf. Ibid., 34.

195 Ibid., 34.

196 Chatumarn Kabilsingh, "A Vision of Dharmic Society: A Buddhist Woman's Perspective": http://www.inebnetwork.org/thinksangha/tsangha/chatsumarndsbook.html (accessed 17 May 2015).

197 Cf. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Women in Buddhism*, 68.

potential of women's contribution in society. She firmly states that once the Buddhists lose sight of the main principles, the tendency is to lose the direction given by the Buddha.

Dhammanandā is quite aware of the situation that in Thailand many negative social attitudes towards women stem from a misunderstanding about sex and she claims that "sex should not be a way for men to express power over women, or something that only men enjoy and women submit to."[198] For her, this is a major issue with regard to the suffering of Buddhist women based on gender discrimination.

Dhammanandā appreciates the vision of the Buddha who made his appearance in the midst of extreme social discrimination and degrading attitudes towards women in India. She asserts how his teachings such as *kamma* and rebirth gave rise to considerable positive changes in social attitudes towards women during his time. Dhammanandā highlights such teachings of the Buddha as the affirmation of woman's potential to achieve enlightenment and that one is responsible for one's own actions and its consequences. She made the important distinction that the core teachings of Buddhism are free from contextual and gender bias by their very nature. As a result, she opposes the negative attitudes, teachings and practices that render women secondary to men.

In the view of Dhammanandā, the Buddhists who listen and meditate on the teachings of the Buddha have no reason to justify or to continue with their oppressive patriarchal power over women. She underlines that believing the Buddhist teaching that everything is inter-dependent, means that the suffering of the 'other' should be 'my' suffering.

2. Affirming the Potentials of Women: Karma Lekshe Tsomo

2.1 A Biographical Sketch of Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Karma Lekshe Tsomo is a Tibetan nun who has become a leading spokesperson for Buddhist women's issues in both Asia and the West. She is one of the first organisers of the first Buddhist women's international conference: *Sakyadhita*.

198 Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, "A Vision of Dharmic Society: A Buddhist Woman's Perspective": http://www.inebnetwork.org/thinksangha/tsangha/chatsumarndsbook.html (accessed 17 May 2015).

Karma Lekshe Tsomo was born to American parents in 1950 and was christened Patricia Jean Zenn. Her fascination with Buddhism developed because of her family name, Zenn. In an interview she asserts, "I was born into a family with the last name 'Zenn', so the kids at school used to tease me about being a Zen Buddhist. I didn't know what that was, so I started to read about it."[199] Despite the hardship of finding books on Buddhism, Karma Lekshe Tsomo attained enlightenment by her psychological insights and the practical methodology of liberation that is found in Tibetan Buddhism. This enthusiasm led her to enter monastic life. She relates, "[A]s a child, I very much wanted to become a *monk*; it was not until years later that I became reconciled to becoming a *nun*. We need to reflect on why these two words conjure up such different mental responses [emphasis is mine]."[200]

Karma Lekshe Tsomo travelled to Japan at the age of nineteen and started meditating, but she had to spend many years searching for a qualified teacher who was willing to teach nuns. During her life she was able to live within many Asian Buddhist communities that gave her the unique opportunity to study Buddhist texts with *Vinaya* scholars and practitioners.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo writes in her book, *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Buddhist Monastic Ethics for Women*, "in 1977, when I received the precept of a novice nun in the Tibetan tradition, I was unaware that full ordination was not available to women within that tradition."[201] Since the Tibetan tradition does not have a lineage for full ordination for women, Karma Lekshe Tsomo received her full ordination in another tradition in Korea, and from then on she worked to gain acceptance for the Buddhist nuns' ordination in countries and traditions where it did not exist.

Throughout her life Karma Lekshe Tsomo experienced that women were not guaranteed equal rights, which meant for her that women do not have equal human rights. That is logical, she says. Furthermore she states that "[B]uddhism invites us to check our motivation: why are we living?

199 Audrey Lin, "*Karma Lekshe: Women in Spirituality*": http://www.servicespace.org/blog/view.php?id=16601 (accessed 26 April 2015).

200 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Ordination as a Buddhist Nun," in *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1989), 63.

201 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Buddhist Monastic Ethics for Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), viii.

What's the purpose of this life? In some traditions, the idea is to achieve liberation, not only for one's personal benefit, but in order to relieve the suffering of others."[202]

2.2 Basic Characteristics of Karma Lekshe Tsomo's Philosophical Method

Karma Lekshe Tsomo is highly fascinated by the psychological insight and practical methodology of the Tibetan Buddhist approach, and her philosophical career was guided by this methodology. Karma Lekshe Tsomo's philosophical method is, however, based on the lived experiences, especially the experience of women in Buddhist cultures, who are marginalised within their own Buddhist traditions.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo's analysis of the cross-cultural Buddhist women's situation in social, cultural, economic, and academic spheres, leads her to develop her own insights of doing philosophy at a grassroots level. She goes beyond human-made divisions such as ethnicity, religion, caste and class, as her philosophical method is inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-linguistic.

2.3 The Philosophical Conceptualisation of Karma Lekshe Tsomo

During her life-long experiences, Karma Lekshe Tsomo realised that Buddhist women are structurally oppressed by the existing patriarchal and hierarchical Buddhist traditions and schools. She recognises the difference between the original teachings of the Buddha and historical Buddhism. She imagines the injustice that has been done to the laity, especially to women, in the process of the historical transmission of Buddhism.

Being aware of the positive teachings of the Buddha, especially his affirmation of the potential of women in attaining spiritual goals in Buddhism, Karma Lekshe Tsomo re-reads history from the perspective of women. An important aspect of her research is the question what women did to implement Buddhism and how Buddhism treated women throughout the past generations. Through her feminist critique of women in Buddhism, Karma Lekshe Tsomo tries to recover the unheard or neglected stories of Buddhist women who challenged the social, cultural and religious structures. Thereby, her purpose is to empower Buddhist

202 Audrey Lin, "Karma Lekshe: Women in Spirituality": http://www.servicespace.org/blog/view.php?id=16601 (accessed 26 April 2015).

women to end their suffering generated by gender discrimination. She is convinced that this creative way of dealing with the lives of women will stimulate women to view themselves with self-respect and to change the negative and harmful attitudes towards women in society.

2.4 Karma Lekshe Tsomo's Understanding of Suffering

Karma Lekshe Tsomo says that all compounded phenomena are characterised by *dukkha, anitya* [Pāli: *anicca*] and *anatman* [Pāli: *anattā*]. In speaking on suffering, Karma Lekshe Tsomo recognises the difference between the social context of the Buddha's lifetime and contemporary society. As regards the present context, she is deeply concerned about the welfare of all living beings who are suffering under different kinds of violent social structures. The root causes of suffering that the Buddha identified can therefore not be limited to an individual level: it is also important to address the structural causes of suffering.

In general, as a woman who had first-hand experience of the marginalisation of women in Buddhist society and in particular, as a Buddhist nun, Karma Lekshe Tsomo is aware of the way in which women are strategically oppressed within Buddhist institutions in all Buddhist traditions. Her main focus is on suffering generated by gender discrimination against women. She clarifies that discrimination against women does not occur in a vacuum, instead it is linked with many other social, religious, cultural and economic factors.

2.4.1 Key Themes Related to the Suffering

2.4.1.1 Suffering Generated by Gender Discrimination

Karma Lekshe Tsomo, being aware of the teachings of the Buddha, the social context in which Buddhism emerged and the historical background of the Buddhist institution after the death of the Buddha, openly addresses the gender discrimination against women. She speaks about the exclusion of women in leadership roles and decision-making, and the limited access of women to full ordination. Despite the fact that the Buddha established a religious community of laywomen, laymen, ordained nuns and monks with equal spiritual capacity, in Buddhist communities patriarchal hierarchy is still intact. Monks remain dominant and discriminate against women

including the ordained nuns. Karma Lekshe Tsomo contends that in all Asian Buddhist communities men, with their access to monastic life and education, become scholars and leaders while women have restricted access to ordination and Buddhist education.

In *Buddhist Women across Cultures: Realizations*, Karma Lekshe Tsomo articulates Buddhist women's actual involvement in Buddhist traditions amidst different kinds of gender oppression by male domination.[203] She highlights the following common characteristics of Buddhist societies: they are patriarchal in nature, male dominated, have oppressive hierarchies, they limit access of women to ordination, education, leadership roles, and there is an ignorance of the high spiritual potentiality of the laity. Buddhist women are forcefully silenced through cultural and traditional customs, norms, rules and regulations, and misinterpretations of the Buddhist texts in order to maintain patriarchal hierarchy over women. Even though Buddhist nuns are theoretically on an equal footing with monks, in practice the nuns are oppressed and considered to be secondary to the monks, simply because they are women. Lekshe Tsomo shares one of her own experiences to illustrate women's exclusion in her tradition:

> The monasteries were always the learning centers in Tibet, and in most Buddhist societies. And those great learning centers were not open to women. Women were systematically excluded from them. So it meant that once my male classmates learned Tibetan, they could go down to South India and just check in to one of these amazing monastic learning centers. But there was no place for me to go. Women were not welcome there.[204]

Karma Lekshe Tsomo claims that discrimination against Buddhist women is a matter of ignorance, which has a connection with all the root causes of suffering. She therefore says that the first step toward ending suffering, in this case caused by gender imbalance in Buddhism, is recognising that women are discriminated against in all spheres of the Buddhist world. Karma Lekshe Tsomo thus insists that the suffering generated by discrimination against women is to be recognised in order to

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203 Cf. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Mahaprajapathi's Legacy: The Buddhist Women's Movement: An Introduction," in *Buddhist Women across Cultures,* 1-34.

204 Audrey Lin, "Karma Lekshe: Women in Spirituality": http://www.servicespace.org/blog/view.php?id=16601 (accessed 26 April 2015).

end this particular suffering, and the first step towards correcting this gender imbalance in Buddhist society is, "considering derogatory references to women in the Buddhist texts, and looking at the discriminatory attitudes toward Buddhist women in Buddhist temples and Dharma centres."[205]

2.4.1.2 Naming the Harmful Attitudes towards Women

Karma Lekshe Tsomo states that throughout the history of Asian society, the life of women was always viewed in relation to their male partners, and it is in particular their role as mothers and chaste wives that is valued: in many Asian countries, the ideal woman is a loyal, chaste wife and mother rather than an active participant in the public sphere.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo points out that Asian social and cultural male attitudes towards women are even to be found in some of the original Buddhist texts, translations and interpretations.[206] As she states, gender discrimination in South Asian society in the Buddha's time is clearly apparent in the gender discrimination in the *Vinaya*: the issue of the eight special rules (*gurudharmas*) that are imposed on *bhikkhunī-s* are an example thereof. In speaking of the eight *gurudharmas*, Karma Lekshe Tsomo indicates that by eight *gurudharmas*, the *bhikkhuṇī saṅgha* is dependent on the *bhikkhu saṅgha* in five ways: "[B]hiksunis must pay respect to Bhiksus, seek ordination from both Bhiksu and Bhiksuni *saṅgha*s, invite a Bhiksu twice a month to give an exhortation, hold their rains retreat in a location where there is a Bhiksu, and in case of a

205 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "*North American Buddhist Women in the International Context*": http://www.sakyadhitacanada.org/docs/North%20American%20Buddhist%20Women%20-%20Ven%20Karma%20Lekshe%20Tsomo.pdf (accessed 24 April 2015).

206 The honoured position and the higher status of women began to decline due to the emergence of the negative ideas of Brahmanas towards women. Brahmins classed women with the *sudra* – lower caste – and they wanted to bring women under their control. The result was that women had to face unexpected hardships. As women they did not have any right in this social structure; the pathetic situation was they did not even have a right to their own bodies. According to Manu, the great law-giver of the second century, a woman does not deserve freedom; her life in childhood to the father, in youth to the husband and his elderly kin and to the son when widowed. It is no doubt that the fate of women under the monopoly of Brahmins was very inhuman.

sanghāvāsa offence, be reinstated by a manatva conducted before both *saṅgha*s."[207]

Karma Lekshe Tsomo explains that many Buddhists, including many women have the negative idea that female birth is inferior to male birth and refer to women as being inclined to lust, aversion, and craving.[208] The most common term for a woman in Tibetan is, for example, 'skye.dman' meaning 'inferior birth'.[209] Karma Lekshe Tsomo's experience of living in the Western Himalayan regions has led her to reflect on the manner in which the theory of rebirth leads many women to accept hardship and suffering in their lives with joyfulness. She reveals that the way these women understand the teachings of the law of *kamma* has a great impact on their lives. They view misfortunes as the ripening of the unwholesome actions of the past life. Accordingly, they think that they are unable to change these misfortunes in their lives, because the theory of *kamma* encourages them to accept misfortunes passively. These women suffer more than men, yet the theory discourages many women from changing the oppressive social structures that suppress them in their family, social, religious and economic lives. These women are encouraged to accept all kinds of suffering as the result of bad *kamma* they had done in their previous lives. Therefore, along with the teachings on human rebirth, impermanence and *kamma*, Karma Lekshe Tsomo highlights the importance of the teachings on loving kindness and compassion, which inform personal and social interaction.[210]

One of the major issues in Buddhism is, as Karma Lekshe Tsomo contends, the over-emphasis on the Buddha as a male. She claims that the Mahayana tradition teaches that all beings have the Buddha nature – the capacity for complete awakening – yet, the image of perfection,

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207 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Is the Bhiksuni Vinaya Sexist?" in *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (New York: State University of New York, 2004), 45.

208 During the time of the Buddha, with the influence of Brahmin teachings, many people thought the birth of a daughter was a result of bad '*kamma*' in a previous lifetime. Even many Buddhists who followed the Buddha's teaching held this attitude toward women; however, the Buddha did not directly discuss the reason why a person is born a male or female.

209 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Change in Consciousness: Women's Religious Identity in Himalayan Buddhist Cultures," in *Buddhist Women across Cultures,* 177.

210 Cf. Ibid., 170-175.

'Sakyamuni' Buddha and cultural heroes are male. In the same way, she says that even though the Vajrayana branch of Mahayana Buddhism says that women have the potential to achieve awakening here and now, the problem is that women do not have access to religious education, practice facilities and the elements of sustenance.[211]

The elements of patriarchy and sexism are inextricably interwoven in the Indian social and cultural milieu within which women's spiritual capacity is affirmed including the ordination of Buddhist nuns. As a result, Karma Lekshe Tsomo says, it is difficult to distinguish patriarchy from sexism and vice versa.

> Although the Buddha took certain steps to challenge gender and class hierarchies by ordaining women and members of the lowest castes, the role reversal of having monks bow to nuns would have been an extreme cultural inversion that might have caused widespread rejection of this message … the Buddha taught enlightenment to all, but he was not explicitly a social reformer or a feminist. Although his teachings were applicable of all social categories and have been interpreted by some as socially liberative, his intentions were soteriological, not political.[212]

Gender attitudes in Buddhist society are not abstract, instead they affect the lives of women, both lay and ordained. It is, states Karma Lekshe Tsomo, time to unlearn these gender and discriminatory attitudes against women that have been taught for centuries, through the use of philosophical, historical, and biological approaches.

2.4.1.3 Beyond the Harmful Attitudes Concerning Women

While encountering different attitudes toward gender imbalance in Buddhist society, Karma Lekshe Tsomo examines the most common attitude, that is, to ignore the problem of gender imbalance altogether, to dismiss it. She identifies four challenges women have to face regarding gender imbalance. Firstly, most people are blind to gender inequalities. Secondly, people often dismiss gender imbalance and say that gender equality is not necessary for *dhamma* practice. Thirdly, people may deny that there is a problem by asserting that there is no gender imbalance in Buddhism, because women can do anything men can do and women

211 Cf. Ibid., 175-176.

212 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Is The Bhiksuni Vinaya Sexist?," 65.

are able to achieve whatever they strive for. Fourthly, some trivialise the problem and say that status is a worldly concern and has nothing to do with *dhamma*. This can create a misunderstanding between those who are involved in social actions and those who are not.[213]

Karma Lekshe Tsomo argues that it is apparent that Buddhist literature contains references that can be used either to discriminate against women or to empower women. For Buddhist women, re-reading the texts in the light of the past events that occurred in the Buddhist institution in connection with the political, social and cultural spheres, is therefore a significant need in today's context. Stories of spiritually accomplished women in Buddhist texts are however fewer in number than the stories about men, which is mainly due to the fact that they were written and translated exclusively by men. In view of all of this, Karma Lekshe Tsomo questions whether the discriminatory undercurrents are fundamental to Buddhism itself or whether they are reflections of the cultural and social contexts within which Buddhism has evolved. She also questions whether some changes occurred as these Buddhist sources were recorded/interpreted/translated after the death of the Buddha, mainly by Buddhist monks throughout history.[214]

For Karma Lekshe Tsomo it is essential to bring the successful approaches of women in history and their spiritual attainments, especially during the period of the Buddha, to the fore. For example, she highlights the life of Mahaprajapathi, the aunt of the Buddha, who began a spiritual and social revolution in Northern India with her enormous effort to get access to women's ordination.[215] Karma Lekshe Tsomo also asserts how in *Therīgāthā* the *bhikkhunī-s*' quest for the ultimate religious goal is clearly seen. Those women were ready to renounce worldly life and achieve higher spiritual goals, while the patriarchal society expected them to be married, bear children and obey the husband. The patriarchal notion embedded in

213 Cf. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Family, Monastry, and Gender Justice: Re-envisioning Buddhist Institutions," in *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 10.

214 Cf. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Mahaprajapathi's Legacy: The Buddhist Women's Movement: An Introduction," 5.

215 Cf. Ibid., 5.

Buddhist literature has to be revised in a new global ethic to reveal the hidden spiritual potential of women for a social transformation.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo argues that negative attitudes toward gender can change in Buddhist society due to the following reasons. Firstly, because Buddhist practice is concerned with the transformation of consciousness, and because Buddhism has no gender. Secondly, since the Buddha affirmed that women are capable of achieving enlightenment as are men, discrimination against women is inconsistent with a fundamental Buddhist principle. Thirdly, whatever they practise in reality, Buddhist monks know that gender discrimination is unacceptable in the modern world. She argues that if Buddhists are true to the teachings of the Buddha, they must stand up for gender justice: justice for all human beings regardless of gender.[216] That is the path for true peace, states Karma Lekshe Tsomo.

It is relevant to highlight the Buddhist teachings that present a viable theoretical framework for spiritual and social transformation. Buddhism posits that if behavioural patterns are learned, they can be unlearned,[217] and therefore the rights of women in accessing ordination, education and leadership roles in all Buddhist traditions, need to be affirmed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo realises that addressing gender discrimination is a matter of education that requires attention and activism on the part of Buddhist women and men. The first step Buddhist feminists working for gender equality take, states Karma Lekshe Tsomo, rests on foundations of gender equality expressed by the Buddha contrary to the prevailing ideologies of his time. Secondly, these efforts profit from the experience of the broader feminist movement as to organisation, communication and networking.[218]

2.4.1.4 Challenging the Discrepancy between Buddhist View and Practice

Karma Lekshe Tsomo, while focusing on Buddhist teachings, claims that the Buddha's methods of mental cultivation were open not only for men but for all human beings. It offered women alternatives to

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216 Cf. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Family, Monastry, and Gender Justice: Re-envisioning Buddhist Institutions," 14.

217 Cf. Ibid., 3.

218 Cf. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Family, Monastry, and Gender Justice: Re-envisioning Buddhist Institutions," 17.

conventional domestic roles in the patriarchal social milieu during the time of the Buddha. His path to enlightenment in overcoming suffering is accessible to all lay people and renunciants, regardless of class, ethnicity, or gender.[219] The assumption of women's spiritual inferiority still exists in most Buddhist communities, says Karma Lekshe Tsomo.

According to Karma Lekshe Tsomo, the teachings must be concerned with issues of the highest concern such as loving kindness, compassion and the development of wisdom, yet what she experiences within her Buddhist society is totally contrary to the true *dhamma*. She therefore sees it as incorrect to justify gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is a problem for Buddhist women and an impediment to *dhamma* practice for both women and men: it is a source of great suffering.[220] In a *dhamma* talk, she once said that, "if Buddhists want to become a model for social change in the world, we have to address the inequality in our own traditions."[221]

Karma Lekshe Tsomo's discussion on gender discrimination in Buddhism offers the opportunity to study the serious discrepancy between theoretical equality and *de facto* bias. When the Buddhist texts assert women's potential to achieve liberation, Karma Lekshe Tsomo asks: what about the injustices suffered by Buddhist women, how can these be excused? Since, there is no gender discrimination in the Buddha's teachings, there cannot be any gender discrimination in Buddhist communities who take refuge in the Buddha, *damma* (teaching) and *saṅgha* (community). In her view of the existing discrimination against women especially with regard to access to the ordination of women in the Buddhist community, Lekshe Tsomo suggests that "perhaps (as is whispered) there are fears in some quarters that nuns would become so numerous as to encroach upon the financial support of the monks or so well respected as to threaten the undisputed power and prestige of the monks. The high standards of women's meditation practice and moral discipline may bring embarrassment to

219 Cf. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Introduction to *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming against the Stream*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), xvii.

220 Cf. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "North American Buddhist Women in the International Context": http://www.sakyadhitacanada.org/docs/North%20American%20Buddhist%20Women%20-%20Ven%20Karma%20Lekshe%20Tsomo.pdf (accessed 24 April 2015).

221 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "*Women in Buddhism":* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbAijRlg0-E (accessed 25 April 2015).

monks whose practice has become lax … Even so, there are also many benefits that may result from recognising the equality of women…"[222]

Karma Lekshe Tsomo states that all sentient beings are suffering in their *saṃsāra.* Becoming conscious of the suffering leads Buddhists to enlightenment, not only their personal liberation but also the liberation of all sentient beings, through compassion and contemplation. For Mahayana Buddhists actions provoked by compassion and implemented through skillful means (*upāya*) constitute *bodhisatva* activity, a form of activism.[223] For them, form is less important than intention and as a result they highly value actions that contribute to spiritual or social transformation, such as studying *dhamma*, practising meditation and standing in a picket line.[224] Karma Lekshe Tsomo affirms that for Buddhists to be involved in social activities is a meritorious action as its aim is to alleviate the suffering of living beings.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo considers greed, hatred and ignorance to be the root causes of both personal and social problems. She recognises two major issues among Buddhists with regard to social problems. First, many Buddhists do not yet understand that many social problems have to do with the inequalities of structures in society and the above mentioned predicaments. Secondly, most Buddhists have not yet challenged the oppression of women in society.[225] Based on her tradition, she sees the importance of reaching out to the others who are suffering. Hence, going beyond some charitable work that Buddhists do to relieve the suffering of people, Karma Lekshe Tsomo recognises the need to address the violent social, religious, economic and political structures, which make many people suffer in life. She claims that for Buddhists to speak of loving

222 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Comparing Buddhist and Christian Women's Experiences," 247.

223 The reflection on the *bodhisattva* or the selfless individual is a dominant idea within a Mahayana Buddhist framework. The *bodhisattva* is a person who is dedicated to alleviate the suffering of others and Karma Lekshe Tsomo states three specific criteria of becoming a *bodhisattva*: renunciation, *bodhicitta* (cultivating the compassionate mind of enlightenment) and direct insight into emptiness. The *bodhisattva* doctrine of universal salvation is regarded as a result of compassion for all beings.

224 Cf. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Socially Engaged Buddhist Nuns: Activism in Taiwan and North America," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 10 (2010): 461.

225 Cf. Ibid., 480.

kindness, compassion, and the liberation of all beings from suffering, without putting these lofty ideals into actual practice, is hypocritical.

In reviewing the patriarchal attitudes, Karma Lekshe Tsomo makes an important statement, in which the significance of transforming the gender stereotypes of harmful cultures is implied:

> When the Buddha recognized the equal spiritual potential of women, it represented a significant departure from prevailing views that defined women almost entirely in terms of their biological function and their capacity for productive labor. Significant as it was, this recognition alone was not sufficient to transform the gender stereotypes of entire cultures.[226]

As a person who really is aware of the inter-connectedness of beings in the whole world, Karma Lekshe Tsomo realised that to be conscious of the inequalities of women that exist in society, it is important to move out of one's own comfort zones towards the other Buddhists in the world. In her effort to bring together Buddhist women in Asia and the West, one of her main aims was to make space for women to know each other and share their experiences. In that way, she wanted to create a new cultural setting where the women could adapt Buddhist teachings. In 1987 she took the initiative to form an international Buddhist women's movement, which is known as 'Sakyadhita' ('Daughter of the Buddha'), the International Association of Buddhist Women. It allows Buddhist nuns, laywomen and children the space to grow both academically and spiritually.

2.5 Summary

Karma Lekshe Tsomo, undoubtedly came to the realisation that the Buddhist teachings of suffering were basic truths for all sentient beings. Her focal concern is the suffering of women due to the oppressive structural violence in Buddhist patriarchal society throughout history. She distinguishes between unavoidable suffering as a result of bad *kamma* in past experiences and avoidable suffering as the result of oppression in patriarchal society: male dominance over women. In Karma Lekshe Tsomo's view, the structural violence against women certainly cannot be considered as something women deserve due to their bad *kamma*. She

226 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Mahaprajapathi's Legacy: The Buddhist Women's Movement: An Introduction," 26.

challenges any kind of unjust social structure that makes people suffer, highlighting the oppression and marginalisation of women in particular.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo is aware of how women in Buddhist societies struggled to overcome their suffering because of oppression, marginalisation and dehumanisation in patriarchal society. Hence, she denounced the gender discrimination against women in Buddhism as something totally contrary to the teachings of the Buddha. She portrayed how such negative attitudes and practices towards women in society do harm the peaceful coexistence in any society.

Being conscious of the reality of women in society, Karma Lekshe Tsomo showed considerable courage in naming the oppression of women as 'oppression' in Buddhist patriarchal society. She claimed that it was a part of Buddhism to see and name the reality as it is. She felt that women did not name their oppression, as they thought that they deserved by fate the suffering that they underwent in their cultural and religious milieu. Therefore, while challenging the prevailing misunderstandings about women, she made women aware of their potential to overcome suffering and to attain liberation in this world. For this, she reread the historical records of women and about women who were courageous and creative in dealing with the patriarchal mind-set, while innovating alternative ways.

Emphasising the Buddha's affirmation of women's equal potential to attain Buddhist goals, Lekshe Tsomo developed awareness among women not to be victims of oppressive social structures, but to be conscious of the ability to overcome suffering in life and to be united for that task. She claims that any practice of gender discrimination of women in Buddhist society cannot be justified for any reason because of the Buddhist view that the *dhamma* is neither male nor female, but beyond gender.

3. Inclusion of an Androgynous Account of Women: Rita Mary Gross

3.1 A Biographical Sketch of Rita Mary Gross

> I have frequently used autobiography as an element in making a case or explaining my stance. Feminist theologians and scholars are much more likely to be autobiographical in their professional writing than their more

conventional colleagues, who find self-disclosure embarrassing and feel that reason alone should be used to express one's position.[227]

Rita Mary Gross (July 6, 1943- November 11, 2015) was an American Vajrayana[228] Buddhist Feminist theologian,[229] a historian of religions, a Buddhist *dhamma* teacher and an author who was internationally known for her innovative work on gender and religion. As she understood it, her scholarship as a comparative scholar of religion, her life as a feminist and her spiritual practice as a Buddhist are not three separate aspects but rather an integrated mosaic.

Gross was born in 1943, into a traditional Lutheran family in Northern Wisconsin. Her childhood and teenage years were dominated by the natural world and a cultural order. During that period, women pursuing graduate studies and intellectual inquiry were less tolerated due to cultural (mis)understandings regarding women. Her parents, who were not educated, did not value education. The role of Christian women was to be married and have children. Based on the existing cultural and religious backdrop in the 1950s in her village, Gross was overprotected and over controlled by her mother who preferred "a less intelligent child who wanted to stay on the farm to milk cows."[230] With all these experiences of being a girl, she thought, "why did I have to be a girl! Girls can't do

227 Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling: Buddhist Perspectives on Contemporary Social and Religious Issues* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1998), 3.

228 Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism, which was developed in India, is based on Mahayana Buddhism, but it goes beyond the teachings of Mahayana. Vajrayana Buddhism is often regarded as the form of Buddhism that most radically includes women and the feminine. However, women as a class did not experience anything close to equality with men as a class, over time, not even in Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism. See, Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 10-11.

229 Rita M. Gross understands feminism as a religious movement that crosses religious boundaries and has implications for all religions: feminist theology as a theology of religions. See, Rita M. Gross, "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64.

230 Rita M. Gross, *A Garland of Feminist Reflections: Forty Years of Religious Exploration* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009), 43.

anything that I want to do. I don't want to have kids; I want to explore the world and to think."[231] She was not happy about being a girl, until she came to the realisation that there was nothing wrong with her being a girl, but that the problem was the 'system'. This awareness made her appreciate herself with all her potential and to work on gender in a broader perspective. However, her personal journey of academic achievement was not a smooth path. Gross recounts, "[I]t is not an exaggeration to say that I have often been punished for my academic achievements, which are not valued by most of my colleagues."[232]

Speaking of her childhood and teenage religious experience, Gross states that being a Christian, she received systematic training that confidently asserted the one true faith. She was taught that only Christians knew the truth, so that it was necessary to refute all other points of view, which seemed very harsh to her even as a child. With confusion in her religious atmosphere and her childhood that "consisted of indoctrination into an extremely rigid and literalist form of Lutheranism," she used to question her priests and teachers from her childhood.[233] When Gross was twenty one years old, after the death of her mother, she was excommunicated by the Lutheran Church, saying, "[Y]ou have sold your soul for a mess of academic pottage."[234] Later on she converted to Judaism, but eventuallty made a different choice. Yet, she appreciated two things in her experience as a Jewish woman: (1) She became a part of a community in which she was accepted and in which she could participate wholeheartedly; (2) In Judaism, it is okay to have a brain.[235] It became however more and more difficult for her to take the notion of a personal God seriously.

Regarding her experience of becoming a Buddhist, Gross says that first she decided not to become involved with Buddhism as a religion, because of her experience of the two former religions. She found meditation to be a good technique for her. She also speaks of how things changed: "I

231 Rita Mary Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation* (London, New York: Continuum, 2001), 35.

232 Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling*, 39.

233 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *A Garland of Feminist Reflections*, 25.

234 Rita Mary Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*, 28.

235 Cf. Ibid., 39.

could not believe myself when I found myself asking to 'take refuge' to become a Buddhist in my first formal meditation interview, but that's what happened ... this Buddhist journey has definitely not been without its own frustrations."[236] She acknowledges that her conscious life plan certainly never included becoming a Buddhist.

Reflecting on her past as a Wisconsin farm girl who became a Buddhist feminist, critical and constructive thinker when she grew up, Gross says that "[I]t is hard even for me to imagine travelling those distances, for the world of my childhood was very small and impoverished, both economically and culturally."[237]

3.2 Basic Characteristics of Rita Mary Gross's Theological[238] Method

As a Buddhist feminist theologian, Gross states that the feminist method uses autobiography as a tool; as a means but not as an end in itself.

> We [feminists] experienced strongly that our specific situation as women in patriarchal societies affected our interests, our concerns, and the results of our scholarship; we also saw quite clearly that the methods and values that our male mentors and colleagues assumed to be universally valid actually depended to some extent on their experiences as men. Eventually we also came to see that not only gender but also race, class, culture, sexual orientation, and the like, had their impact on scholarship. Therefore, we are unlikely ever again to be naive enough to believe that the scholar's experience does not affect her scholarship.[239]

In most of her work, Gross used to describe her methodology as a 'method of inseparability' or 'unity of methodology', or 'mix disciplines'. It emphasises three perspectives, namely: the cross-cultural, comparative

236 Ibid., 46-47.

237 Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling*, 20.

238 Rita Mary Gross gives two important reasons for her preference for using the term 'theology': (1) It is well-known and well understood by the audiences because scholars do not address only Buddhists; (2) The term clearly connotes that we are thinking within the confines of a specific tradition. Cf. Rita Mary Gross, "Buddhist Theology?," in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, eds. Roger R. Jackson and John J. Makransky (London: Routledge Curzon, 2000), 57.

239 Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling*, 4.

study of religion, feminism and Buddhism. In Gross's point of view, all these aspects are intertwined in all her work.

> ... in every case, I combine methods and approaches that most scholars separate. Thus when thinking about religion and the study of religion, I combine the approaches of the history of religions and of theology. When thinking about feminism, I see feminism as both academic method and as social vision. Finally, when studying Buddhism, I seek both the historically and sociologically accurate knowledge of Buddhology and the 'insider's' understanding of a Buddhist.[240]

Gross claims that there is a trend that insists on a rigid separation between theology and the history of religion. As a result, a scholar has to make a choice either for immersion in one's subject matter or distancing from it: 'either or', which makes the possibility that one could move between these two stances unacceptable. Gross rejects this dichotomy between descriptive scholarship and reflective world construction, and gets involved in methodology that combines disclosure and autobiography with reflection and analysis.[241] This is the main reason for her to be both a Buddhist feminist theologian and a historian: two sides of being. This is incompatible for some scholars in the academic world who try to prove that their thinking is independent of personal experience and universally applicable. As Gross states, "rather than choosing one identity and rejecting the other, I attend to the dialogue between them and to what this dialogue teaches me about attending to religion, whether to study, to understand, or to participate in religion."[242]

Gross recognises that historians need to share values such as eschewing apologetics and practising empathy as the necessary foundation for doing constructive, reflective thinking about religion relevant to the crisis situation of our world. She emphasises that this 'is the point at which one truly begins to mix disciplines, to cross forbidden lines, and to risk one's reputation as a reputable scholar. But if I am correct, such a step only makes explicit what is already implicit – all scholars have their own agendas."[243] In her 'method of inseparability' or 'unity of methodology' or 'mixed disciplines', she works simultaneously as a comparatist, a

240 Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 5.

241 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling*, 19-20.

242 Ibid., 19-20.

243 Ibid., 32.

feminist, and as a Buddhist theologian. She works both as an outsider and an insider.

3.3 The Theological Conceptualisation of Rita Mary Gross

From Gross's point of view, Buddhism is not just an ethical and philosophical system, but it is also a mediation system. Hence, according to her, the foundation of Buddhist life has to be based on three integrated aspects, worldview, ethics and mediations. While thinking of the world in Buddhist terms, she speaks about an increasing urgency "to bring the wisdom of Buddhist tradition into discussions of issues such as feminism, ecology, and social change in general."[244]

Gross articulates two major tasks of doing Buddhist feminist theology, (1) Using Buddhism as a tool for thinking about the present situation; (2) Suggesting modification to and interpretations of Buddhism.[245] Gross considers 'feminism' – 'radical practice of the co-humanity' – as an essential issue with which engaged Buddhism needs to be approached.[246]

3.4 Rita Mary Gross's Understanding of Suffering

Rita Gross claims that Buddhism points out to its adherents the cause of and the cure for human suffering. As traditionally communicated by Buddhism, she says, first and second Noble Truths claim that there is suffering in life and the cause of such suffering is rooted in craving, which is the 'bad news'. The 'good news' is that human beings do not need to remain in such useless and painful states of being, as they can experience the tranquillity of enlightenment. The 'best news', according to Gross is that there is a workable path – the Noble Eightfold Path – to diminish the burden of excessive desires.[247] Since Buddhism is non-theistic she affirms that according to Buddhist teachings, a supreme being would be unable to relieve human suffering, so that only human beings are capable of that feat.[248]

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244 Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling*, x.

245 Cf. Ibid., x.

246 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling*, 3.

247 Cf. Rita M. Gross, "Women in Buddhism," in *Buddhism*, ed. Peter Harvey (London and New York: 2001), 205-206.

248 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 7-8.

Speaking about the fundamental teaching of Buddhism, that all suffering is caused by self-cherishing, she says that this proposition seems indisputable to her. But she raises two concerns:

> First how do we know what is impossible? Is a just society impossible? Second, is this statement made of the collective of human beings, or of individual human beings? That human beings are collectively responsible for human suffering is rather obvious. Wars, poverty, racism, sexism, and homophobia are all caused by our rather immutable nature. However, the statement that we cause our own suffering is often applied to the individual.[249]

Being a feminist, her main concern is freedom from gender roles, which goes beyond gender equality because gender roles are the problem that needs to be overcome. She states that the most basic problems in Buddhism are not with belief but with practice. She finds intolerable contradictions between Buddhist belief and practice, especially with regard to women's full participation in Buddhism. The beliefs are gender neutral and gender free, but the practices show male domination over women.[250] Gross claims that "this version of male privilege is more subtle than that presented by monotheistic religions, and, therefore, perhaps more tenacious."[251]

3.4.1 Key Themes Related to Suffering

Gross names the three major generalisations about women's roles and images found throughout the Buddhist history. Firstly, the proper images and roles for women have always been an issue and there have always been two major attitudes towards women that are diametrically opposed to one another. There are opinions and texts presenting the negative views of women. Conversely, women are said to have the same spiritual capacities as men because gender is totally irrelevant to the spiritual quest. The latter notion becomes stronger in later forms of Buddhism. The attitude that there is some problem with female birth has been far more popular and widespread than the attitude that gender is irrelevant and women are not to be denigrated.[252]

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249 Ibid., 173.

250 Cf. Ibid., 140.

251 Ibid., 143.

252 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 115-116.

For Gross, we first and foremost "need to do whatever it takes to undermine the assumption that *gender* is a women's issue, is another term that can be used interchangeably with *women*. Until then, the paradigm shift in models of humanity that is our most basic agenda will still be incomplete."[253] Therefore, it is important to scrutinise the ambiguous views of women in Buddhist texts as it helps to understand the root causes of the different views of women throughout history.

3.4.1.1 Ambiguous Views about Women in Buddhist Texts

Gross states that from the beginning the Buddhist position of women is unclear and ambiguous. The Buddhist literature on the one hand, demonstrates some awkward issues about women and on the other hand, it portrays women as capable as men in achieving ultimate goals in Buddhism. Quoting only one part, one could speak positively about women or could consider Buddhism to be very egalitarian in its treatment of men and women. Being aware of a variety of explanations given to these two sets of texts, Gross states, "I prefer not to rest simply with modern scholarly method of easing the problems presented by these two contradictory sets of texts."[254]

In speaking about the Buddha's reluctant approach to the nun's order, Gross highlights two important issues to be considered before any judgment of the matter: (1) Should women be allowed to pursue the Buddha's goal of *nirvāṇa* as world renouncers, as homeless mendicants? And (2) If women are ordained into world renunciation, what will be their status and relations with the male renouncers? While dealing with these two questions, she finds that the Buddha is not represented as a misogynist,[255] but he comes across as androcentric and patriarchal.[256] Gross does however appreciate the effort of women who took the initiative to become nuns "fuelled by their own experiences of suffering caused by patriarchy, to challenge him

253 Rita M. Gross, *A Garland of Feminist Reflections*, 69.

254 Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 33.

255 It is important to differentiate clearly among these three terms, androcentrism, patriarchy, and misogyny. According to Gross, "androcentrism is a mode of consciousness, a thought-form, a method of gathering information and classifying women's place in the (male-defined) 'scheme of things'. Patriarchy is the social and institutional form that usually goes with androcentrism [gender hierarchy of men over women]. Misogyny is … hatred (or fear) of women and femininity." Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy,* 22.

256 Cf. Ibid., 34.

[the Buddha] to do something unconventional and out of the ordinary regarding gender arrangement."[257] Gross claims that women, not men, usually take the initiative for non-patriarchal gender arrangements.

The central point of the eight special rules (*garudharma*) given by the Buddha in ordaining Mahaprajapathi is that it confirms the conventional gender hierarchy of men over women. Gross states categorically that those rules certainly presented no inherent barrier to a women's spiritual attainment: they mandated *institutional subordination***,** but not *spiritual subordination*. The consequence of the major issue connected to the admission of women's order has the most serious impact on women in Buddhist society. Therefore, she claims that, "the omniscience of a Buddha, whatever it may mean, does not include eternally accurate scientific or historical statements, not eternally valid institutional forms and rules ... It is a matter of distinguishing essential insights from non-essential cultural trappings."[258] According to Gross, one important point in this historical event is that the Buddha was ready to change his mind despite all the restrictions that he had before permitting a women's order.

Speaking of five woes of women in Buddhist texts, Gross recognises two categories of woes, the biological and the social woes. With regard to biological woes – pregnancy, childbirth and menstruation – Gross suggests that "women might have different assessments if, and only if, women have the reproduction freedom to decide whether, when, and how often to endure pregnancy and child birth."[259] Even though Buddhism is not pro-natalist in its views and does not consider biological reproduction as a religious requirement, many Buddhists try to limit women's reproduction freedom. Women are forced to bear children without any consent from their part. Gross claims that the literal mother in Buddhism is not a spiritually valued model. It is not idealised because of the suffering attendant on motherhood, yet motherhood as a symbol is highly regarded in the androcentric social construction. While opposing abortion, as it violates the first Buddhist precept – no harming living beings – many Buddhists are silent about sonograms that detect the sex of a foetus combined with abortion for sex selection, especially abortion of female foetuses in Asia.[260]

257 Ibid., 35.

258 Ibid., 39.

259 Rita M. Gross, "The Suffering of Sexism: Buddhist Perspectives and Experience," *Buddhist Christian Studies* 34, no.1 (2104): 72.

260 Cf. Ibid., 73.

The other two social woes – leaving home at marriage and taking care of husbands – are more arbitrary, dependent on social and cultural norms, rather than on biology. In Gross's view, in today's context, multigenerational patrilineal households are much less common. With regard to the fifth woe, Gross contends that the role of women in household life is prevalent even in many societies at present. As a result, in many Buddhist societies women's education in *dhamma* is limited and eventually there are less female *dhamma* teachers, and it has a great impact on negative attitudes towards women.[261] Gross sees the need to break the female monopoly on motherhood and the male near-monopoly on the introduction of spiritual discipline and *nirvāṇa*: "[B]reaking these two monopolies, which make women primacy childcare givers and men primary Buddhist teachers, will begin to undo all the extra and unnecessary negativity and pain brought to *samsara* by those monopolies."[262]

In Gross's view, in general, except for the issues connected to the women's order, the other stories about the Buddha's interactions with women in the canonical texts are much more useful. But the fact is that instead of sharing these life-giving passages, all the negativities about women in the texts have been overly emphasised, while the positive parts have been strategically ignored throughout history, due to androcentric record keeping practices. Gross asserts that it is not wise to come to the conclusion that a whole period or school is misogynist, while looking only at the misogynist passages in the texts.[263] In androcentric thinking, she says, (1) The male norm and the human norm are collapsed and become identical; (2) It is assumed that the generic masculine habit of thought, language, and research is adequate; to study males is to study humanity; and (3) Women are discussed as objects exterior to 'mankind', as 'other'.[264] These presuppositions have led many scholars to think that feminist symbols and constructs of the ultimate are secondary or unusual. Whether unconsciously or not, this has caused serious deficiencies in the history of religions. Gross claims that reading history, on the one hand seeks an accurate record and on the other hand seeks a usable past, which

261 Cf. Rita Mary Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet,* 70.

262 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 241.

263 Cf. Ibid., 42.

264 Cf. Rita Mary Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*, 57.

are inter-dependent and also distinct essential goals within the discipline of religion.[265]

3.4.1.2. Suffering due to Sexism

It is relevant to begin the discussion on suffering because of sexism, with the following questions raised by Gross: "does the shape of our genitals really predetermine our hearts, minds, longings, and abilities? Does it have anything to do with one's ability to think theologically or to excel at spiritual disciplines?"[266] Her concern is that gender roles severely constrain people. For her, the real suffering of sexism is the true problem rather than male dominance, which is the most unfortunate result of sexism.

Gross contends that the engaged Buddhist movement has been slow to recognise that it is essential to deal with the problem of suffering because of sexism. In Buddhism *bhikkhuṇī* ordination is very often the only gender issue discussed, but not the full topic of androcentrism and patriarchy.[267] It is surprising to notice the silence of those who work for justice in economic and political spheres on the issue of sexism and gender justice. Gross's concern is how there can be economic and political justice when women are oppressed within the same structure?

The most prevalent trend in Buddhism with regard to the gender issue is trying to ignore the problematic saying, "enlightened mind is neither male nor female, but beyond gender." This notion has led many women to acquiesce to male dominance, rather than trying to change the oppressive patriarchal structures. The problem is not the enlightened mind, but the main problem is male dominated institutions. Gross articulates two major positions in her work on Buddhism and gender. Firstly, the more normative view, not often practised, is that enlightened mind, the birth right of all human beings that goes beyond gender. Secondly, the much more visible but much less normative view that gender matters a great deal and that it is far more fortunate to be a man than a woman.[268] In Buddhism there is an intolerable contradiction between the *view*: gender-neutral and gender free and the *practice*: male domination over women.

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265 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 72.

266 Ibid., 69.

267 Cf. Ibid., 69-70.

268 Cf. Ibid., 71.

Gross says, "... trying to ignore or repress something so obvious would only make it re-appear in even more disruptive forms, as so often happens with women's low self-esteem, poverty mentality, depression, and lack of significant achievements."[269] Therefore, instead of ignoring the issues that oppress women, she brings them to light in order to overcome suffering generated by gender inequality.

3.4.1.3 *Kamma* and Justice

Gross speaks about two aspects of *kamma*: vertical *kamma* and horizontal *kamma.* in Gross's view 'vertical *kamma*' is the *kamma* that comes from one's infinite past as well as from the past of this life, and – dependent on one's present actions – determines what kind of future he/she will have. This kind of *kamma* seems to predominate in understanding the present personal suffering. In her view, 'horizontal *kamma*' is the *kamma* that extends out infinitely from this moment, this point, into all directions. She draws the distinction between these two types because if only vertical *kamma* is emphasised, the opportunity to discuss the present situation of injustice in society would be ignored or mistaken: "suffering due to present human agency, to horizontal karma [war, poverty and sexism], is certainly not inevitable and unavoidable in the way that suffering due to vertical karma, or the inevitabilities of birth, aging, sickness, and death, is unavoidable."[270] No one could simply say that poor deserve to be poor, by virtue of their *kamma,* says Gross. Nor could one say that women deserve to be dominated by men by virtue of their *kamma*, because in Buddhist thought *kamma* is not predestination: "[I]f it were, there would be no point to practising Buddhist spiritual disciplines, because the developments of awareness, insight, and compassion would have no effect on predestined outcomes."[271]

From Gross's point of view, whatever type of *kamma* is considered, it is important to locate them in the arena of freedom, where one can make choices. Even though one cannot change the present lot, there is a possibility to deal with the present situation in different ways. Therefore, according to Gross, in this understanding of *kamma*, no one can say that he/she has

269 Rita M. Gross, "Working with Obstacles: Is Female Rebirth an Obstacle?": http://feminismandreligion.com/2013/02/06/working-with-obstacles-is-female-rebirth-an-obstacle-by-rita-m-gross/ (accessed 1 June 2015).

270 Rita Mary Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*, 174-175.

271 Rita M. Gross, *A Garland of Feminist Reflections*, 237.

to suffer due to misdeeds in the past, and that there must be someone who must harm and oppress him/her. The present injustice one experiences in society cannot be understood by the traditional understanding of *kamma*. Gross does not deny vertical *kamma*, but she suggests that vertical *kamma* alone is not sufficient to understand the present suffering in oppressive social systems. In her view, systems cause suffering, rather than individuals alone. Gross states, "we cannot change the past, but change and choices happen all the time in the present realm of horizontal Karma. It is important to link the words *choice* and *change* with the words *oppression* and *justice* when discussing the topic of Karma."[272]

3.4.1.4 Female Rebirth

According to Gross, there are two components to the reaction of women's present suffering: firstly, it is taken for granted that the social system must be structured as it is currently. The Buddhist tradition portrays two descriptions to justify the suffering of women, namely five woes of women and a social rule that a woman must always be under the control of a man. Secondly, society considers unfortunate happenings as the way things are and cannot be helped – being reborn as a woman is unfortunate and the result of bad *kamma* in past.[273]

In patriarchal societies, where women's lives are more difficult and less rewarding than men's, it is not surprising to hold the view that the female birth is a misfortune. As Gross claims, the classical Buddhist solution to the problem is to seek male rebirth. Classical Buddhism, rather than seeking to change one's present oppressive condition, emphasises that one should serve well in one's allotted role, knowing that such good acts would produce merit leading to a more fortunate rebirth in the future.[274] It is apparent how many Buddhists try to justify gender hierarchy and male domination through the reflection on negative *kamma* and the female birth.

It is important to note two focal points that Gross shares about the reflection on *kamma*. Firstly, the law of *kamma* is about cause and effect: it is not a theory of reward and punishment. Secondly, *kamma* is not a theory of predestination. Whatever the notions existing in the social and cultural milieu might imply, the law of *kamma* does not explain why some people

272 Rita Mary Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*, 177.

273 Cf. Ibid., 175.

274 Cf. Ibid., 64.

are born into different life conditions such as being born addicted to crack, while someone else is born into a loving family.[275]

In the view of Gross, the traditional explanation of the difficult position of women in the present situation – due to the bad *kamma* of the previous life – affirms that women 'deserve' what they get. Consequently the emphasis lies on how to increase good merits in order to obtain a better future situation: the promise is male rebirth. From Gross's point of view, such traditional applications of teachings can be used very effectively against women who passively accept these teachings without questioning them because they are told that they reap what they have sowed. Thus there is no basis for complaint, and thus they can also be told "if they rebel against the system by trying to change patriarchal norms concerning the treatment of women, they are creating negative karma for themselves."[276] It is essential, says Gross, to understand that the traditional way of analysis is only an *explanatio*n, not a *justification*. She also notes, "[W]hat causes the negativity of women's existence under patriarchy is not women's karma, but the self-centered, fixated, habitual patterns of those in power, of those who maintain the status quo."[277] Even for one who holds on to this traditional *explanation*, there is no point in contributing to the misery of others because in Buddhism, contributing misery to the sufferer could be a cause that activates an effect of negative *kamma* to him/herself.

Gross states that "willingness and courage to name oppression as oppression, not as the way things have to be, not as inevitable and unchangeable, but as oppression, deriving from the self-interest and habitual patterns of both oppressors and oppressed,"[278] was never a part of Buddhism. She therefore insists that, "it is important to be able to regard active resistance to oppression and attempts to find an ethically more appropriate social order as a part of spiritual discipline and bodisattva activity"[279] and necessary to go beyond the common terminologies used in relation to suffering such as acceptance, non-aggression and forbearance. Gross draws attention to the need of sorting out the things that can be changed and actively work to change them, rather than passively accept them as 'just my *kamma*'. This is the most important aspect of social activism.[280]

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275 Cf. Ibid., 142.

276 Ibid., 143.

277 Ibid., 145.

278 Ibid., 145.

279 Rita M. Gross, *A Garland of Feminist Reflections*, 171.

280 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 146.

3.4.1.5 Freedom from Suffering within the World

The Buddhist understanding of the Four Noble Truths reveals that the meaning of freedom from suffering means freedom from rebirth. Since birth into this world brings pain, it is unavoidable. Gross portrays how this way of understanding easily leads to otherworldly and anti-worldly concerns. Based on the essential term 'freedom', she suggests an alternative way of interpreting freemdom, "not as freedom *from* the world, but as freedom *within* the world."[281]

A more profound view of the Four Noble Truths further discloses the main reason for suffering as desire: our deepest desires are for permanence, says Gross. This is opposite to the main teaching of Buddhism that everything is impermanent. It is crucial to grasp the notion that the real problem is not an unsatisfactory world, but unsatisfactory desires regarding that world: "freedom is achieved when the desires and ignorance that cause suffering rather than freedom are given up."[282]

Gross states that freedom from the world and freedom within the world are authentic and traditional notions in Buddhism. The anti-worldly interpretation was generalised and dominant in early Indian Buddhism. The non-dualistic interpretation became more important some centuries after the historical Buddha, but the earlier form of interpretation was never replaced by the latter: "Buddhism understood as freedom *within* the world and informed by the concerns of feminist and post-patriarchal women (and men) will undoubtedly address concerns and issues unthinkable to patriarchal and male-created Buddhism understood as freedom *from* the world."[283]

Gross states that Buddhist patriarchy is inadmissible on Buddhist grounds: gender privileges are incompatible with Buddhism on both Buddhist and feminist terms: "a Buddhist patriarch could ignore feminism with ease, and probably would. He should pay more attention to Buddhist demonstrations that patriarchy is contrary to Buddhism, that in fact fosters one of the most basic *samsaric* traps discovered by Buddhist spiritual practice, that it fosters ego rather than egolessness."[284]

As explained earlier, gender inequality or gender hierarchy disagrees with the major teachings of Buddhism that are remarkably free of gender

281 Ibid., 149.

282 Ibid., 149.

283 Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 151.

284 Ibid., 167.

bias. The sexist practices, which are contradictory to the Buddhist view, violate the pure teachings of Buddhism. Hence, Gross describes that when the Buddhists tried to explain and justify gender hierarchy, "they relied upon the pan-Indian and pre-Buddhist idea of karma, interpreting this general statement regarding cause and effect into a claim that women's difficult situations were the result of negative karma and previous misdeeds."[285] The teachings thus remained untainted by arguments using them to justify patriarchy and androcentrism. Gross, being aware of this intolerable contradiction between the Buddhist view and Buddhist practices, suggests an androgynous reconstruction of Buddhism – the *dhamma* is both female and male.

Gross explains that Buddhism simply lacked a prophetic voice: "liberation was thought to be fostered, not by just social forms, but by renunciation. Therefore, the issue of better or worse social forms was of little consequence to Buddhists."[286] However, the most important fact is that despite all these hierarchical structures, women were not restricted from achieving the Buddhist goal of spiritual liberation.

Gross identifies two major historical forces that could have a major impact on Buddhist views on and practices regarding gender. Firstly, the causes and conditions that sustained patriarchy as plausible and tolerable are finally exhausting. Secondly, Buddhism is no longer developing in intellectual and spiritual isolation. It is undergoing mutual transformation through its encounter with the prophetic voices of Western religions and feminism.[287] Gross perceives Buddhism's growing involvement in global intellectual and spiritual developments, how Buddhism is ever more subjected to the prophetic voice, which is more central to the Buddhist idea of Inter-dependent Co-arising. In her inter-religious dialogue, while speaking of what Buddhists could learn from Christians, Gross asserts the importance of the prophetic voice as a useful resource for Buddhist feminism: "[T]he prophetic voice spoken by a Buddhist cannot be simply borrowed from Judaism or Christianity; it will have its own intonations and nuances because its speakers are speaking it with their own accent. *Inspiration* is probably a better word than *borrowing* for this process ..."[288]

285 Ibid., 210.

286 Ibid., 214.

287 Cf. Ibid., 215-216.

288 Rita Mary Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*, 166.

3.4.1.6 Androgynous Vision of Reforming Buddhist Practices Surrounding Gender

Gross's main point is to overcome the contradiction between view and practice in Buddhism, as it is necessary to reform Buddhist practices surrounding gender through gender equality while applying *dhamm*a equally to women and men. Women have to be considered as human beings, not as objects to be controlled or limited because of a male-constructed worldview. The shift that Gross suggests is a shift from an 'androcentric' mind-set to an 'androgynous' mind-set, or in terms of Gross, both male and female. This model of an androgynous mind-set is not only different from androcentrism or male-centred consciousness, but also differs from a sex-neutral model, because a sex-neutral model is not sufficient to overcome the challenges of androcentrism. It is important to see the difference between these two concepts: "*dhamma* is neither male nor female" and "*dhamma* is both male and female."[289]

For Gross, the slogan that *dhamma* is neither male nor female, has been used by patriarchy to discriminate against women throughout the history. Hence, it is essential to bring about a genuine post-patriarchal consciousness and form of society while taking women's experience seriously.

Gross argues that even though Buddhists should not need to care about gender, engaged Buddhists have no option, they must care about gender due to two main reasons.

> First, among all the social concerns upon which engaged Buddhists generally focus, internally, Buddhism's record on gender is far worse than its record on racism, colonialism, economic injustice, or militarism; second, of all the issues that engaged Buddhists care about, gender alone is within the control of Buddhists, at least within our own Buddhist world.[290]

As the engaged Buddhists state that gender is a minor issue compared to war, race and economic justice, Gross asks, if this happened not just to women, but also to men, by male dominant gender practices, how then would we rank suffering? Gross argues that it is not correct to claim that concern for gender justice and gender equity is only a modern evaluation, because, she says, according to the historical records "... Buddhists have *always* been concerned about women's proper roles and images and …

289 Cf. Ibid., 222.

290 Ibid., 246.

Buddhist tradition includes a long, old tradition of arguing against male prerogatives."[291]

From the point of view of feminism, the major thesis is to assert how patriarchy makes us all feel bad, says Gross. The first Noble Truth that reveals that suffering is basic, would bring some relaxation from the constant struggle to avoid pain.

Obviously, for Gross gender roles are the sources of pain and suffering, and as a result eliminating them is the vital task of overcoming suffering. As she says, "if people are forced to find their social place on the basis of their physiological sex, then there will be suffering and injustice even in a situation of 'gender equality' – whatever that might mean."[292] Eradicating patriarchy and the suffering it causes, is an important priority, applicable even for a Buddhist society. She makes a profound distinction between freedom from gender roles and gender equality.

3.5 Summary

In the view of Gross, "[R]eligion is not only an abstract set of ideas, but also something practised by people, half of whom are women. Given that all cultures have gender roles, religion affects women differently than men."[293] The main focus of Gross is on suffering and gender roles. In her profound analysis she shows that throughout history women were not considered to be interesting or important in the value system of androcentric scholarship.

Gross claimed that traditional Buddhism had often separated women's religious lives, making them invisible or unimportant. As this was the reality of many religions, Gross recognised four important facts: (1) Those who kept the tradition's records chose to record men's experience and thinking much more frequently than women's; (2) Even when information about women was recorded, later commentators often neglected to keep those records alive in communal consciousness and memory; (3) When contemporary academic scholars study the history of a religious tradition, they usually focus on what the tradition itself has emphasised: the male version of the records; and (4) Many contemporary practitioners within that tradition were ignorant of the history of women.[294] Gross stated the

291 Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 116.

292 Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion*, 24.

293 Ibid., 65.

294 Cf. Ibid., 72.

significant claim: "all verbal doctrines are in the realm of relative, not absolute ..." This point had been made over and over in Buddhist texts, because in Buddhism, doctrines were really a part of skilful means, not non-verbal wisdom.[295] As examined throughout the present part of this chapter, the most important element is that despite all the restrictions in Buddhist societies, women reacted to male dominance in various ways.

In speaking of gender roles, Gross suggested that there was an intolerable contradiction between the Buddhist view and practice. Due to these contradictory views Gross concluded that Buddhist women rarely got the opportunity to study the teachings of the Buddha and the nun's order had been lost in many Buddhist societies. Gross states: "rather than altering the non-patriarchal Buddhist worldview, the patriarchal institutions surrounding Buddhist spirituality need to be reformed and reconstructed. Such was the difficult agenda of Buddhist feminism – an agenda that would also eventually have subtle implications for the Buddhist view."[296] According to Gross, in order to overcome the contradiction between the Buddhist view and practice, it is necessary to have a shift from an androcentric mind-set to an androgynous mind-set, different from androcentric consciousness and the sex-neutral model.

To overcome the suffering of women, it is also necessary to rewrite the history of thought in order to include forgotten experiences of women and female imagery. This androgynous account necessarily includes descriptions of women's lives and consciousness, the cultural stereotypes and norms made about women or femininity without androcentric projections, expectations and stereotypes.[297]

Final Reflection

A closer study of the reflection on suffering from the point of view of three Buddhist feminist thinkers – Dhammanandā, Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Rita Mary Gross – revealed that they identified androcentric models of humanity that put men at the centre of attention or favoured masculinity over femininity as their engagement. Such a model of humanity was also found in Buddhism. Men were considered as normative humans and women on the periphery as 'objects' being named by the males, and a bit inhuman.

295 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 257.

296 Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion*, 140.

297 Cf. Ibid., 80.

Such a model, perpetuated through the centuries in Buddhism and imbibed by Buddhist society, made women invisible not in religious leadership but in ordinary households. The three feminist thinkers emphasised that such a conception of humanity regards men as normal and women as exceptions to the norm, and how patriarchy regards men as rightful leaders and women as subservient to men, helping men to maintain their status and positions that society values.[298] Both an androcentric model of humanity and patriarchy share the same attitudes towards women and hold the same values regarding women: women are objectified as non/inhuman and not considered to be gendered beings, issues of women are either side-lined or not talked about, or seen as irrelevant and a waste of time.

While emphasising that unless and until the root of this enslavement was identified and studied, a framework for liberation was impossible. Dhammanandā clearly identified and specified the source that had been twisted in order to promote the oppressive structures in Buddhism. The most important aspect of her reflection is that while identifying the problem of gender discrimination she articulates the need of rereading the history from the perspective of women: a need for an alternative to that androcentric model of humanity. While affirming the potentials of women that could be nurtured and cultivated on teachings of the Buddha, Dhammanandā argues that there never was any reason for degrading women spiritually, physically or mentally, as the teachings of Buddhism were free from contextual and gender bias.

Similarly, Karma Lekshe Tsomo's concern was to identify root or hidden causes of suffering, which women in Buddhist societies experience. While affirming that suffering is inescapable and integral to human living, she also points to untold suffering by women that results from patriarchal oppression. Her prophetic voice challenges male dominance over women found in Buddhist tradition, institutions and in Buddhist societies, because it is completely opposed to the noble teachings of Buddhism.

Gross, on the other hand, presented feminism as the *radical* practice of the co-humanity of women and men, and adopted an existential approach to trace the root of suffering. Her unique approach was inspired and aided by her multi-disciplinary method of doing 'theology'. Her reflection helps to nuance and bring into fruition the reflections of the other two Buddhist feminist thinkers. Gross states that freedom from gender roles is far more

298 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion*, 19-20.

important than equality, where women should be able/forced to do the things men had always done and vice versa, or a total lack of hierarchy. In her perception gender roles are the source of the pain and suffering of humanity. Gross highlighted the difference between freedom from gender roles and gender equality. Identifying gender roles as the problem to be overcome, Gross suggests an androgynous, two-sexed or bisexual model of humanity, instead of an androcentric model of the one-sexed model of humanity. By doing so, Gross emphasises that despite gender and sexual differences, both sexes – male and female – are equally human. This model is different from the sex-neutral model of humanity that ignores the reality of culture-based gender roles. This was the Middle Path that she suggested: 'both-and', rather than an 'either-or' answer. However, since, the engaged Buddhist movements have been very slow to recognise that women do suffer discrimination by sexism, Gross states that gender issues cannot be secondary to economic, political or any other issues in society and instead should be treated as a part of social injustice.

All three Buddhist feminist thinkers agree that to liberate women from their enslavement within the existing social and religious structures, it is necessary to understand causes of such oppression. This entails accepting reality as it is: the oppressive situations as oppression. While believing that self-liberation, that is, ego-lessness is the ultimate goal of human existence, as shown in Buddhism, they articulate that there are other goals of life which can help one attain full liberation. Hence, they identify liberation of women from oppression and marginalisation as one of those major goals that can help one attain liberation.

Conclusion

This chapter studied and analysed the notion of suffering as presented in Buddhist philosophical thinking. The exploration was presented under three headings: (1) Suffering in the view of Theravāda Buddhism; (2) A critical analysis of suffering from the perspective of three engaged Buddhist thinkers; and (3) A more critical analysis of suffering from the perspective of three Buddhist feminist thinkers.

In the first part of the chapter, which dealt with the suffering in the view of Theravāda Buddhism, I discussed suffering in relation to the three important inter-connected components of Buddhism: suffering (*dukkha*), impermanence (*anicca*) and no eternal soul (*anattā*). According to the

teachings of the Buddha, suffering is common to both men and women and there is no gender or any other classification in *dhamma*. Moreover, whatever is impermanent, anything subject to change, anything not autonomous generates suffering.

The three engaged Buddhist thinkers claimed that in today's context, which is more complex than the society in which the Buddha lived, it is a felt need to apply the teachings of the Buddha anew where many are suffering because of unjust social structures. Hence, the second part of the chapter studied the teachings of the Buddha so as to determine its validity not only for a personal liberation, but also to liberate all the people from the suffering generated within unjust social structures. The three engaged Buddhist thinkers challenged the teachings that place personal *nirvāṇa* at the centre of its dogma while *neglecting* the suffering of the society. They do not feel that it is justified to attribute suffering to the bad *kamma* of the previous life. In their social analysis of suffering, they identified different root causes that generate suffering in society. Since suffering is not an isolated issue it is necessary to discuss the reality of suffering not only as an individual phenomenon but also the social aspect of it. The present chapter highlighted the importance of engaging with the collective suffering in a society and the importance of the liberation of all those who suffer – an engagement that could help reach the ultimate goal of being a Buddhist, that is, *nirvāṇa*.

Even though the three engaged Buddhists spoke broadly about society and religion, their findings were not sufficient to offer an alternative society to overcome gender inequality, especially in Buddhism – a tradition in which they find their common home. Gender inequality is simply not a major issue to them. What has to be changed and re-constructed is a society in which women are oppressed and marginalised as peripheral and inhuman.

The last part of the chapter discussed suffering from the perspectives of the three Buddhist feminist thinkers: *bhikkhuṇī* Dhammanandā, *bhikkhuṇī* Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Rita Mary Gross. While speaking about basic tenets with regard to suffering in Buddhism, they rejected the justification of gender imbalance in Buddhism. They emphasised that there could not be gender discrimination in a Buddhist society, as the Buddha taught that all, irrespective of their gender, are equally worthy to reach the ultimate goal of life in Buddhism.

The three Buddhist feminist thinkers furthermore challenged the androcentric and patriarchal model of humanity, which objectifies women as non-humans, silences women without even allowing them the freedom to share the suffering they experience in the existing oppressive structures. A distinctive element in their argumentations was that they challenged the oppressive teachings in Buddhism that justify the control and the suffering of women. On the other hand, they explored teachings of Buddhism where the dignity of women is affirmed and the equality of women and men is upheld. They firmly claimed that this way of exploring the positive teachings about women in Buddhism might help women to overcome their suffering in society.

The three feminist thinkers named the suffering of women as suffering, because, for them, naming the suffering of women is a greater challenge in society. They unearthed the hidden stories of Buddhist women in Buddhist tradition and brought forth inspirational stories of women from different parts of the world, not only to affirm the dignity of women but also to empower them to join hands for the liberation of the world. In the view of the Buddhist feminist thinkers, the oppression of women in society and religion was not suficiently perceived by the three engaged Buddhist thinkers.

Since the focus of this research is the approach of Buddhist and Christian war-widows to their marginalisation and suffering, the last two chapters dealt with suffering as perceived in Christianity and in Buddhism. It helped to understand the official teachings of both these religions on suffering and to analyse significant philosophical and theological thought on and contributions to suffering that did emerge in the history of both Buddhism and Christianity. It provided the ambiance to study the impacts these teachings and thoughts had on the lives of widows. In the second chapter, it was described how the war-widows responded, reacted or resisted to their marginalisation in their society, culture and religion which are so closely inter-connected. The study of and reflection on the findings of the field research discussed in chapter two and the theological/ philosophical explorations of the chapters three and four provided a solid platform to further the research. The next endeavour is, therefore, to explore the challenges that emerged and are emerging from the struggles of the Buddhist and Christian war-widows.

Part III

THE IMPARATIVE VENTURES

Chapter Five

NEW THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES THE STRUGGLES OF THE BUDDHIST AND CHRISTIAN WAR-WIDOWS IN SRI LANKA

Feminist theology in Asia will be a cry, a plea and invocation. It emerges from the wounds that hurt, the scars that hardly disappear, the stories that have no ending. Feminist theology in Asia is not written with a pen, it is inscribed on the hearts of many that feel the pain, and yet dare to hope.[1]

Introduction

The previous two chapters dealt with the Christian theological and Buddhist philosophical thinking on suffering at three levels: (1) Suffering in the official teachings of Buddhist and Christian religious thinking; (2) Suffering from the perspective of liberation theologians/engaged Buddhist thinkers; and (3) Suffering from the perspective of feminist theologians/ Buddhist feminist thinkers.

The objective of the present chapter is to confront the afore mentioned three levels of theological/philosophical thinking on suffering with how the war-widows spoke about their experience of suffering. The confrontation aims at discussing new theological challenges arising from the struggle of the Buddhist and Christian war-widows in SL.

The present chapter contributes to achieving three objectives. The first one is the reconstruction of how the Buddhist and Christian war-widows speak about their suffering based on their lived experience. The second objective is the comparison of the new elements emerging out of the fieldwork on suffering with the theories presented in chapters three and four with regard to suffering in Christian theological and Buddhist philosophical thinking. Taking into consideration the interpretation of suffering within Buddhist philosophical and Christian theological thought, the focus will be to explore how the main ideas and teachings of suffering in Buddhist and Christian thinking influence the war-widows and to study whether the widows move beyond the existing teachings and ideas of suffering discussed in chapters three and four. The third objective concerns a reflection on the challenging experience of war-widows as a source for reconstructing the existing theologies in SL.

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1 Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 32.

In order to achieve the objectives, this chapter will present the discussions under five sub-headings: (1) Theological challenges arising from the struggle of Christian war-widows; (2) Theological challenges arising from the struggle of Buddhist war-widows; (3) The self-definition of the Buddhist and Christian war-widows; (4) War-widows as 'Icons'; and (5) War-widows as an alternative magisterium for Christian theology in SL.

1. New Theological Challenges Arising from the Struggle of Christian War-Widows

The findings of the fieldwork with the Christian war-widows from Sinhala and Tamil communities indicated that the women felt they were human beings longing for freedom and dignity. The majority of them no longer wanted to be victims within the oppressive framework/s defined by the powers of their cultures, societies, and religions. Having gone through struggle, the Christian war-widows had come to realise how important it is to live as persons with dignity. In their search for 'life' in an alternative society, some war-widows had moved away from marginalising conventional patterns of living and had deconstructed the oppressive socio-cultural and socio-political construct, so that they could live in freedom. The experience of new ways of dealing with their own suffering was a starting point for doing theology as well as for choosing a new hermeneutical key.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's four crucial points of the feminist category of experience provides perspectives that are imperative for awareness of the importance of the 'experience' of war-widows as a source for theological thinking. She says:

- Experience is mediated linguistically and culturally. There is no 'pure experience' that can be distilled from its *kyriocentric* contexts and texts.
- The personal is political. Personal experience is not private but public: it is socially constructed in and through race, gender, class, heterosexuality, ethnicity, age, and religion.
- Since personal experience is determined socially and religiously, it demands critical analysis and reflection that can explore the social location of experience.

- Experience is a hermeneutical starting point, not a norm. Only certain experiences, namely the experiences of struggle and liberation for justice and radical equality, can be articulated as feminist norms.[2]

Similarly, Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, while highlighting women's experience as a critical principle that can disrupt traditional theological discourse, state, (1) "All theology begins in experience;" (2) "Experience is embodied. It is through the body that people experience and respond to the world."[3] As discussed in chapter two, the war-widows, moving away from the understanding of their present suffering as the result of *kamma* or God-given, embody a unique experience that leads to articulating new ways of reflecting on their experience and new social, cultural, religious and political constructions. The experience of war made some widows aware of their social and political condition, which made them move beyond passive victimisation. They are undeniably the ones who carry the great potential for change and are in a better position to articulate their resistance than others. Starting from the critical experience of the war-widows, the next step is the analysis of the theological challenges arising from the struggle of the Christian war-widows.

1.1 Rethinking the Idealisation of Suffering

'Suffering is a part of Christian life', 'suffering is redemptive', 'there is no joy without suffering', these are the recurring themes known to many Christians in SL. Suffering is one of the main themes emerging from the fieldwork done with the Christian war-widows and also a major theme discussed in chapter three from the perspective of Christian theological thought. Understanding any suffering as the will of God, was a recurring theme which the interviewed women articulated as "[I]f God wants me to suffer, I cannot avoid it," or "This is my cross, I have to bear in my life."

Suffering, being a common reality among the people in Asia, is closely connected with sexism, classism, racism, militarism and colonialism, which are inter-linked. Many Asian authors discuss the fact that suffering is certainly a common element among Asians, but women in Asia suffer more than men. Asian women have for centuries been kept

2 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 171.

3 Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Goddess and God in the World: Conversations in Embodied Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 290.

powerless, their bodies beaten, their voice silenced, their dignity trampled on. They are marginalised in economic, political, religious institutions, so that Marianne Katoppo as early as 1980 declares, "woman is the other in her own home."[4]

The freedom of women in Asia is restricted as they are expected to live by traditions prescribed by patriarchal society informed by religions. In the family, they are supposed to be obedient to the male members, not allowed to be outspoken in matters related to family, society or politics and are furthermore mostly economically dependent. Kwok Pui-lan raises the point that alongside the familial and social pressures, the religions play a major role in the oppression of women. She contends that women, although being the majority in the Asian Churches, are marginalised through the power structures, and are neither recognised nor respected by the male hierarchy of the Church due to misogyny within the Christian tradition and notions of purity and taboos in Asian religious traditions.[5] For a woman to reject what the dominating structures dictate is a taboo in the Asian context. In the view of C.S. Song, "what we have in many countries in Asia is a culture of suffering within a culture of domination."[6]

Mary John Mananzan writes, "[T]here is not total human liberation without the liberation of women in society."[7] In her understanding, the struggles of women for liberation is an essential inseparable part of a society's overall liberation. Aruna Gnanadason argues in relation to this that women can only become liberated when they challenge the oppressive institutions in their society, such as religion, and culture while adequately recognising and analysing institutional violence as "sins against half of the people of God."[8] It becomes clear that total human liberation depends on the women's struggle to overcome oppressive social structures that marginalise them.

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4 Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Women's Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1980), 7

5 Cf. Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 98-99.

6 C.S. Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia* (New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 71.

7 Mary John Mananzan, "Redefining Religious Commitment in the Philippine Context," in *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 105.

8 Aruna Gnanadason, "Women's Oppression: A Sinful Situation," in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1988), 73-73.

The analysis of the fieldwork depicts that war-widows were/are encouraged by dominant norms to accept and remain in suffering, to consider suffering as 'natural', or/and 'part of Christian life' just as Christ suffered.[9] The important theme that emerges is identification with the suffering of Jesus and participation in his suffering, which is passed on through Christian teachings, practices, prayers and devotions. Exploring the experience of war-widows who were/are placed on the 'margin' by oppressive social, cultural, religious and political systems in SL, the effort of the present section is to theologically analyse the theme of suffering, placing the experience of war-widows at the 'centre': war-widows as subjects rather than objects.

1.1.1 Suffering Rooted in Context and Multiple Forms of Suffering

As discussed in the first chapter of the present thesis, since the sixteenth century with the invasion of Portuguese, Christian thought had influenced a section of the population in SL to view suffering as a part of Christian life. The reason for the existing dominant assumption among many Christians that suffering is a part of Christian life can be understood through the explanation of suffering in the institutional Christian thinking discussed in chapter three.

The teachings of the official Church theologically denote that suffering and the death of Jesus are required by God as payment for the sin of the world. This has its roots in the so-called story of the Fall in Genesis.[10] Through presenting Jesus as the model for the endurance of suffering, as one who was obedient to the will of God, Christians have been 'invited' to be co-sufferers, enduring suffering as Jesus did. Due to the fact that the interpretation of the 'violent death' of Jesus is not perceived as the result of circumstances within an unjust social, political and religious context of his time, the emphasis of the institutional Christian doctrine of sin has been on sin as a personal and singularly individualised reality. Church teachings and especially in liturgy it is said that Jesus died on the cross or that he sacrificed his life, but not that Jesus was killed.

Unlike institutional and traditional Christian thought, the war-widows, and also the two liberation theologians – Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon

9 See chapter 2.

10 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part I, section 2, chapter 2, article 4, no. 606.

Sobrino – and the Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann and the three feminist theologians – Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid – consider people's suffering today to be the result of unjust social structures. They challenge the rather abstract and individualised notion of sin in institutional Christian thinking. According to Gutiérrez, "sin is regarded as a social, historical fact, the absence of brotherhood (*sic*) and love in relationships among men, (*sic*) the breach of friendship with God and with other men."[11] Williams states that evil humankind tried to kill the ministerial vision of Jesus by sending him to a horrible cross, and that "the resurrection does not depend upon the cross for life, for the cross only represents historical evil trying to defeat good."[12] Pointing to the social aspect of suffering, the Christian war-widows revealed that their suffering is not an isolated issue as it was inter-related with their ethnicity, religion, gender, class and caste, especially with the stigmatised nature of widowhood in Sri Lankan cultures.

"I happened to become a widow due to the brutal war of the country" [Interview number 2: Tamil Christian].

"This is not my fault, but the fault of the whole society that is unable to respect women" [Interview number 11: Sinhala Christian].

"Widowhood is not a status for others to dominate us in the name of culture" [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

"The government is responsible for our unending suffering" [Interview number 5: Tamil Christian].

"Those who killed, raped and abducted our people have to face the truth" [Interview number 1: Tamil Christian].

"Religion should help us to be free, but our Church leaders dominate us through rules and regulations" [Interview number 9: Sinhala Christian].

"We are not born to suffer and this is not the will of God" [Interview number 10: Sinhala Christian].

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11 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. Cardidad Inda and John Eagleson (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), 175.

12 Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenges of Womanist God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 165.

The responses of widows mentioned above, contain a critique of the existing traditional notion of sin, a notion aligned with punishment, guilt and blame, which has usually presented women as the originators of sin.[13] This androcentric view of evil has led men to believe that women's nature is more sinful than men's and to justify male authority over 'evil' women. As Aruna Gnanadason states, "oppression of women is systematic sin … the situation of women is inextricably linked with the situation of all oppressed groups within the context."[14] This aspect of perceiving oppression of women as systematic sin, is lacking in the reflection of the liberation theologians.

Challenging the existing ecclesiastical perversion of sin, the two liberation theologians and the Protestant theologian draw attention to the social and historical aspect of sin by raising their voices against the oppression carried out by the Global South and upper classes, but they remain mostly silent about the suffering generated by male domination in patriarchal society. Suffering due to sexism is not incorporated in the broader issue of social violence. For example, Gutiérrez says that the poor person today is the oppressed one, the one marginalised by society. For him the poor are the 'non-persons', people who are not recognised as people by the prevailing social order.[15] Nevertheless, the reflection of the liberation theologians on the 'poor', their 'option for the poor', leaves out women who are marginalised and suffer due to male domination. The reason could be their abstract language, which does not specify the complexity of poverty, nor its distinct consequences for men and women.

The three feminist theologians emphasise the importance of reading and understanding suffering from a more nuanced perspective. Their reflections on suffering reveal on the one hand the inhumanity of women's oppression, and on the other hand how religion encouraged suffering by making it imperative as a means of expiation. The praxis of theological reflection of the three feminist theologians accommodates difference and particularity, being more inclusive and specific than that of the liberation

13 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part 1, section 2, chapter 1, article1, no. 417.

14 Aruna Gnanadason, "Women's Oppression: A Sinful Situation," 71.

15 Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), viii.

theologians. Since their approach is self-consciously practical, contextual and historical, the feminist theologians reject the prevailing traditional Christian theology of satisfaction/atonement as it encourages women to embrace suffering passively on the basis that Jesus was obedient to his Father (*sic*).[16] The feminist theologians claim that such a theological vision never helped women to experience true salvation or to experience the reign of God. For the three feminist theologians, the cross of Jesus was the result of an unjust social system of his time: the cross is a symbol of evil that cannot be a means of redemption. Brock holds that even the central image of Jesus on the cross as the saviour of the world communicates the message that sanctioning violence is at the heart of Christianity.[17]

Given their context of suffering, a context in which their existence was threatened, their bodies abused and their womanhood denigrated, the Christian widows asked, "how can war-widows think suffering is good or accept suffering as part of womanhood or Christian life?" From the perspective of the war-widows, the endurance of unjust suffering did not give them happiness in life, in which the norm was reversed, making suffering neither a Christian nor humane thing. The voices of the "silenced war-widows" in SL, their verbal, physical, individual and collective reactions to their suffering provides a way of rethinking and deconstructing the established norms that oppressed them for centuries, as well as a way of reconstructing a theology that supports them in their resistance to suffering.

1.1.2 Resistance against Sacrificial Love: A Passive Submission

Affirming love as a primary answer to the question of the meaning of suffering as per the official teachings of the Church, the Christians who suffer are invited to find salvific meaning in their sorrow as Jesus had taken upon himself the suffering of peoples of all times.[18] Pope Paul VI in his

16 Cf. J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 2nd edition (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), 151-155.

17 Cf. Rita Nakashima Brock, "What is a Feminist? Strategies for Change and Transformations of Consciousness," in *Setting the Table: Women in Theological Conversation*, eds. Rita Nakashima Brock, et al.,... (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1995), 177.

18 Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici doloris*, part III: The Quest for an answer to the Question of the Meaning of Suffering, no. 31.

Decree *Ad gentes* claims, "... the Church … must walk in the same path on which Christ walked: a path of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice to the death, from which He came forth a victor ..."[19] Presenting Jesus as the obedient son who accepted violence as his Father (*sic*) willed it in his (*sic*) divine plan of salvation, Brock probes how "the salvation offered by Jesus is gained by his sacrifice of himself to abuse."[20] She also questions why such a loving God used 'brutal sacrifice' to draw humanity closer to him (*sic*)? Brock points out that "violence is always unholy because it threatens not just the individual soul, but the entire social nexus of life."[21] Avoiding the image of a cruel God who demanded sacrifice, Moltmann claims that Jesus himself freely chose to involve himself in the salvific plan of God.[22] Referring to the theology of Moltmann, the feminist theologians Carlson Brown and Parker state, "Moltmann's view of chosen suffering of Jesus amounts to blaming the victim" Jesus is responsible for his death, oppressed women are blamed for their oppression.[23]

Self-sacrifice, which was upheld as the ideal, became misguided and abusive as women absorbed the ethic of self-sacrifice and the rightfulness of their suffering, assuming that their right place is on the cross with Jesus, accepting 'crosses' with a mentality of divine decree. The widows who were daughters, wives, daughters-in-law, mothers and grandmothers were aware that they were manipulated by the existing teachings in Christianity that value this self-sacrificial love, obedience and silence as virtues to be cultivated in women. In the midst of suffering, the war-widows challenged the norm and asked why only women have to make sacrifices to prove their true love, but very often not men. Sacrifices seemed to always

19 Paul VI, *Ad gentes*, chapter 1: Principles of Doctrine, no. 5 (December 7, 1965).

20 Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 156.

21 Rita Nakashima Brock, "The Cross of Resurrection and Communal Redemption," in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 250.

22 Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 49.

23 Cf. Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World," in *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, eds. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), 18.

come from mothers, but not from fathers; widows have to sacrifice their happiness after the death of their husbands, but not widowers; a widow has to sacrifice her freedom with regard to the issue of remarriage, yet this does not apply to the remarriage of a widower.

"Self-sacrifice is dangerous when it comes to motherhood" [Interview number 9: Sinhala Christian].

"I have to think of myself" [Interview number 11: Sinhala Christian].

"How long do I have to suffer for others?" [Interview number 5: Tamil Christian].

"I cannot deny my freedom thinking of others" [Interview number 4: Tamil Christian].

"If we keep silent in the midst of all kinds of marginalisation, thinking that this is our culture or this is the nature of politics or this is the nature of our religion, nothing will be changed. Therefore, we have to stand for equality and respect" [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

The responses of war-widows reflect a challenge to the Christian traditions that glorify human suffering. It also challenges the view of Christ's self-giving power, which is considered as the restoration of the self that enables joyful self-giving for others. The assumption of the Christian war-widows was that to suffer for others in the name of love, which is a religious, cultural and social expectation, is mainly limited to women. The norm has been reversed by many widows for whom love is not about enduring unjust suffering; for whom love without self-respect, dignity and independence has no meaning. In the context of SL, the silence and submission of widows/women in the midst of suffering is problematic. This becomes worse if the woman/widow happens to be a Tamil. As one widow said,

> Being a Tamil, if I keep silence in the midst of unjust suffering, the people who oppress us will continue to use violence against us. The present experience of our suffering teaches us that we have to stand against the unjust suffering that we undergo due to ethnic domination [Interview number 4: Tamil Christian].

The response of the Tamil Christian widows is a challenge to the teachings in Christianity that overemphasise sacrificial love as a virtue. Pineda-Madrid holds that 'Christian' reflections on suffering have often

advanced the ideal of passive surrender to suffering.[24] The three feminist theologians see that the valorisation of the cross and the placement of Jesus as a victim of violence, as a model for emulation, have negatively influenced women to be passive towards suffering.

The theology of Gutiérrez, Moltmann and Sobrino asserts that suffering is inevitable in the making of a just society. They recognise the suffering and the death of Jesus as acts of self-sacrificial love, thus making the cross the core symbol of redemption. Despite their deeper understandings of suffering, the liberation theologians still encourage martyrdom and victimisation. For Sobrino, the crucified people are a sign of the times; they are the sacramental signs of the active presence of God. He perceives the crucified people as the actualisation of Jesus Christ crucified, the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, that they are chosen by God to bring forth justice to the nations.[25] Moltmann unpacks this idea and concludes, "the perfection of Christ can be witnessed in this violent world only through the fundamental readiness and willingness to suffer and to place oneself in a position of defenceless martyrdom."[26] Compared to the reflection of the liberation theologians who consider the cross to be an example of commitment and justice, the three Christian feminist theologians reject the opinion that there can be no liberation without suffering.

Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro challenges the view of some Indian liberation theologians who depict the cross as the natural outcome of a life of solidarity with the poor, stating that this view is still rooted in the notion of salvific sacrifice.[27] The view of Orevillo-Montenegro is also a challenge to the theological thinking of Virginia Fabella and John Mananzan.

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24 Cf. Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 29.

25 Cf. Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 95.

26 Jürgen Moltmann, "Political Discipleship of Christ Today," in *In Communities of Faith and Radical Discipleship*, ed. G. Mcleod Bryan (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 16.

27 Cf. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, "Shall I Cling to the Old Rugged Cross?: Interrogating and Re-thinking the Power of the Cross," *CTC Bulletin*, 20, no. 3 (Christian Conference of Asia, 2004): 4.

The latter do not glorify the suffering due to oppressive structures, but unlike Orevillo-Montenegro they recognise that "suffering endured for the sake of the realisation of God's reign can be redemptive."[28] Nevertheless, all three feminist theologians reject the glorification of any kind of suffering. According to them, it is problematic to consider suffering as redemptive because it threatens the humanity of women in society, and they disapprove redemptive violence as irrational. Delores Williams challenges the pioneers of black theology like Martin Luther King, Jr. as their vision was to lead black women "passively to accept their oppression and suffering."[29] Brock underlines that innocence is not a survival skill, it does not nurture and empower anyone, rather it makes passive scapegoats.[30] The widows' understanding of suffering aligns with this feminist theology as the widows do not justify or accept their unjust suffering patiently and willingly.

Despite their rejection of unjust suffering, some of the Christian war-widows, in the midst of their daily suffering and oppression, shared a new image of God, an image different to the image of God as a co-sufferer prevalent among Christians in SL. Moving away from the image of God as a co-sufferer, some war-widows recognised God as being with them to resist their oppression. For example, a widow said, "God does not want me to suffer. My suffering is not the will of God. God is with me in my struggle of overcoming my suffering" [Interview number 2: Tamil Christian]. As Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker contend, "to see God as 'fellow sufferer who understands', is to draw God close to all those who suffer and give divine companionship to the friendless."[31] For them, even though it is a theological progression compared to the traditional theological view of God, it does not necessarily offer liberation to those who suffer: "[A] closer examination of one form of suffering God theology will reveal that this apparently new image of God still produces the same answer to the question, how shall I interpret and respond to the

28 Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women* (New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 139.

29 Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 200.

30 Cf. Rita Nakashima Brock, "Ending Innocence and Nurturing Wilfulness," in *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, eds. Carol J. Adams and Marie Fortune (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 77.

31 Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, "For God So Loved the World," 14.

suffering that occurs in my life? And the answer again is, patiently endure; suffering will lead to greater life."[32]

Similar to the theological analysis of the three feminist theologians who reject the glorification of suffering, the widows resist their suffering which threatens their very existence. The war-widows' day-to-day experience of new ways of dealing with their own suffering is a powerful starting point for theologising, for hermeneutics, with experience being essential to the process of theologising. The reflection further seeks for a theology that resists valorisation of suffering and a theology that helps resist the oppressive structures in society, culture and religion. They search for a theology that speaks about their dignity, capacities and the potential of life, rather than a theology that keeps them continuously suffering in the midst of oppression. For war-widows, suffering is not the end but life is important and their struggle is for 'life'.

1.2 Challenging Male Domination is NOT 'Unwomanly'

The glory of a woman is confined to her chastity, the performance of household duties and obedience to her husband.[33] "A woman who likes to be on her own without father, husband and children will bring ill-fame on to the family."[34] The above are the ideas that in the nineteenth century were developed by the Sinhala and Tamil nationalists regarding women, and are still prevalent in both communities. Being in a society, culture, religion and political set-up, which are patriarchal, and being tuned to view themselves as dependent, less intelligent, helpmates of men, sex objects for men's desire, valuing themselves through the prism of male culture, the responses of war-widows identified 'male domination' as a major theme to be discussed as it negatively affects their lives.

Asian women, who comprise more than a quarter of the world's population are not a monolithic group of people, yet oppression of women

32 Ibid., 15.

33 Cf. Malathi de Alwis, "'Housewives of the Public': The Cultural Signification of the Sri Lankan Nation," in *Crossing Borders,* ed. Müller Claudia et al.,... (Suderburg: International Women's University, 2000), 25-28.

34 Arumuga Navalar as quoted by Sitralega Maunaguru, "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protest and Control," in *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, Pradeep Jaganathan and Qadri Ismail*,* 2nd edition (New York: South Focus Press, 2009), 159.

is a major form of oppression in Asia. Women in many parts of Asia are taught three forms of obedience: a woman's obedience to her father, husband and son, as well as four virtues: to be polite in behaviour, language and appearance, and observance of duty – the age-old moral codes imposed on women.[35] Henriette Katoppo describes how in her family, the status of a woman is a derived status: instead of being a person in her own right, she is 'daughter of', 'wife of', or 'mother of' man, thus making women prisoners within a family and society controlled and dominated by men.[36] The prominent view of many Asian feminist theologians is that the Church gives patriarchy not only a practical approval but also a theological one. In the case of Christian women, as Meng Yanling states, "the message the majority of women believers get from preachers is that women in the family should be long-suffering and obedient."[37] In the tradition, women are viewed as "weak creatures, ornaments in the house, happy domestics who should not express anger, but always look nice, etc. In addition the feudal system makes women surrender to the man ..."[38] In an Asian context, the political sphere is restricted for women, which limits women's involvement in decision-making.

The whole life of the Asian woman from her birth to her death is determined by tradition, religion and culture, which are patriarchal in nature. This concerns her dress code, roles as daughter, wife, mother and widow and her place as 'home'. The most oppressive force is that whoever challenges or breaks any of these moral codes stipulated by the patriarchal system, suffers shame, especially a woman who breaks cultural expectations, which is considered as destroying the honour of her family as well as herself. When a woman, in spite of all this courageously takes a nonconformist, creative step out of the 'box' created by the patriarchal culture, society and religion, she is considered 'unwomanly' or deprived of 'woman' qualities. Another factor in Kwok Pui-lan's view is that the

35 Cf. C.S. Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia*, 210.

36 Cf. Henriette Katoppo, "Asian Theology: An Asian Woman's Perspective," in *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology,* ed. Virginia Fabella (New York: Orbis Books, 1980), 143.

37 Meng Yanling, "Women, Faith, Marriage: A Feminist Look at the Challenges for Women," in *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2010), 232.

38 C.S. Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia*, 210.

struggle for women's liberation has been criticised by the patriarchal system 'both western and bourgeois' as neither applicable nor desirable in the context of Asia.[39] Aruna Gnanadason states it clearly, "oppression of women is a systematic sin" and can never be holistic.[40]

1.2.1 Male Domination as a Sin

The Christians who live with the Sinhala Buddhists are influenced by Buddhist culture, whereas Tamils are influenced by the Hindus. Whatever dissimilarities prevail in SL, as in other Asian contexts, male domination is a common feature. As discussed in the first chapter, many women are very much aware of the fact that changing cultural elements made by men is not acceptable – cultural change is irreversible – due to which they tend to remain oppressed and stick to their different roles, thinking that 'this is our culture'. The existing government and religious educational system, religious belief systems, socialisation processes, cultural folk stories and media – advertisements, newspapers, television dramas and movies – promote the idea of the 'virtuous' woman defined by patriarchy. Despite the fact that they are oppressed in the patriarchal family, religion, culture and society, widows do express their desire to live as women with dignity, to challenge and overcome male domination.

Patriarchy was delineated as a major social phenomenon determining the oppression of women in the theology of the three feminist theologians discussed in the third chapter and also in the reflection of the Christian war-widows who consider patriarchy to be a sin. The three feminist theologians – Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid – as the first step in shifting away from patriarchal domination, name patriarchy by its proper name thus breaking the myth that 'naming' is exclusively the prerogative of men. Pineda-Madrid problematises that the killings of girls and women of Juárez is named 'feminicide': "[H]ow we name the suffering of feminicide … requires a shift in how we perceive the structural, systemic roots from which it springs."[41] In the view of Tatha Wiley, "the very purpose of feminist theology is to name evil

39 Cf. Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 17.

40 Cf. Aruna Gnanadason, "Women's Oppression: A Sinful Situation," 71.

41 Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 39.

rightly."[42] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza calls patriarchal sexism "structural sin and evil power institutionalized in societal understanding of sin as transpersonal, destructive power whose ultimate expression is the life-destroying power of death."[43]

The war-widows who recognise the patriarchal structures as a major cause of or as partly responsible for their suffering, also reveal how their religion, intermingled with their own cultures marginalises them based on the perceived 'inferior' nature of womanhood/widowhood. The responses of war-widows indicate that, though suffering is common to everyone, women suffer more than men. The war-widows revealed that they were controlled and oppressed due to the fact that women are considered inferior to men in patriarchal structures. The understanding of the majority of war-widows is that they are considered to be inferior to men in the social structure that differentiates between a woman and a man, a mother and a father, and a widow and a widower. The third chapter explored the stance of the patriarchal Church on the inferiority of women, her subjugation to the male as her superior through the Fall: her punishment for the Fall is to be viewed as loosing the original equality with man.[44] As Aruna Gnanadason states, "male mythology and the gradual patriarchalisation of the church and society have associated woman with 'sinful' nature and have systematically caused and justified the oppression of women."[45] In her view, sin must be viewed as a collective, systematic destruction of the community.

The responses of war-widows indicated two aspects of the 'sin' of male domination in the patriarchal system. On the one hand, the Christian war-widows shared how they were dominated by the patriarchal system through oppressive teachings, customs and rules, which is a sin. On the other hand, in their expression of how they see, feel, think and act in social, religious and cultural situations, widows challenge the existing domination over women, which has its roots in the institutional, patriarchal Christian interpretation of the creation story in the Bible. The challenging responses of war-widows showed a way of understanding how these interpretations

42 Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 157.

43 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, quoted by Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin,* 157.

44 Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, part 1, section 2, chapter 1, article1, no. 417.

45 Aruna Gnanadason, "Women's Oppression: A Sinful Situation," 71.

of the creation story justify the suffering and subordination of women, and how this incites hatred of women in their roles as daughter, wife, mother and widow, or in whatever role they play in society and religion. In the view of widows, when they challenged and dismantled 'sinful' male domination, they were blamed as 'sinners' within the patriarchal system that considers women who move beyond the patriarchal system to be 'unwomanly'.

The patriarchal cultural myths supported by religious teachings have silenced women for centuries. Breaking cultural and religious barriers, war-widows have begun to question, to speak in public against, and to challenge male domination in society, culture and religion.

1) "It is unchristian for men to control women": War-widows who live in patriarchal cultures, reveal how they have discontinued male control over them by deciding what was best for themselves, taking risks to act, following their own consciences. The understanding of the war-widows is that any type of domination cannot be justified, as everyone is created by God in the image of God.

2) "I do not want to be controlled by anyone": Initially the widows had the idea that the social, religious and cultural expectations they were confronted with differed from what was expected of widowers, and therefore began to question why only women were discriminated against. Consequently, they reconstructed cultural customs, wore *tali, pottu*[46] and colourful sarees and by doing this they rejected the idea that widowhood must be exhibited.

3) "We are not sexual objects of men": The war-widows suffered sexual and verbal exploitation in the domestic sphere, workplace, and in other social contexts because of their sex. However, the war-widows revealed their feelings about sexual harassment and challenged the perpetrators in public, something that was not considered to be "womanly" in patriarchal society.

4) "Men are not aware of their sinfulness of dominating women": Recognition of social sinfulness, especially male domination as a source of their suffering was prevalent among the responses of widows. They problematised the social dimension of suffering, as did the liberation theologians.

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46 See page 74.

These challenging responses come together in the statement of one of the Christian widows who was clear and unambiguous in expressing male domination as a sin.

> Many men in our society think that they have power to control and oppress women. This is a sin, which is against the will of God who created both men and women into His image [Interview number 8: Sinhala Christian].

Unlike both institutional Christian thinkers and the liberation theologians – Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino – and the Protestant thelogian Jürgen Moltmann the war-widows spoke about their daily experiences such as sexuality, reproduction, family planning, children, motherhood and even their inner feelings. The 'praxis-oriented' liberation theologians, whose language remains sexist and exclusive, do not speak about women's experiences as praxis; the praxis they speak of is not translated into women's experience. They have been slow and even reluctant to include the issues of 'poor women' in the whole picture of institutional violence suffered by the 'poor' or 'non-persons'.[47]

The responses of war-widows provide a way of rethinking the category of the 'poor' in a more inclusive way, highlighting how liberation theology excludes 'poor' women not only in the economic sense but also in terms of oppression mainly due to male domination. Including 'poor' women/war-widows who are dominated in patriarchal structures within the 'poor' is essential in that it provides insights into a new theological reading of the poorest of the poor in SL. Being deprived of what is traditionally seen as 'womanly' qualities or 'womanhood' is inevitable but necessary for a new theological understanding of the 'option for the poor', one that is manifested through the lived experiences in the socio-political context of SL. 'Option for the poor' in the liberation theological literature must mean, in this context, 'the poorest of the poor', who are women.

The responses of the war-widows along with the perspectives of the three feminist theologians, sheds light on how liberation theologians speak about economic or political justice while neglecting the reality of poor women marginalised by patriarchal structures in society.

Delores Williams considers 'domination' as the result of sin, sin that creates inequality among people due to sex, ethnicity, and religion and other social status. This awareness leads her to speak about a new understanding

47 Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, viii.

of sin and suffering in relation to the cross of Jesus and black women's experience with white and black male communities. As discussed in the third chapter, Williams argues that within the structures of surrogacy, whether it is coerced surrogacy or voluntary surrogacy, black women were/are oppressed due to their sex, race and class. Hence Williams rejects the notion of the classical understanding of the death of Jesus on the cross as the act of redemption. For her, Jesus was the ultimate surrogate and to glorify his cross is to sacralise abuse, a sacralisation of surrogacy. In recognising surrogacy as a structure of oppression, Williams unmasks the sin of surrogacy and by doing so she speaks about sin while placing guilt on the side of society.

Williams's articulation of sin from historical documents of African American women and the experiences of war-widows share a similar theme. Similar to the experience of coerced surrogacy, war-widows were oppressed based on their sex and class, Tamil widows were especially oppressed due to their ethnicity, like black women. The situation of women as widows in the post war-context reflects how the system of patriarchy has created a way of normalising the oppression felt by widows in their culture, turning their submission into oppression. Nevertheless it was clear that many war-widows in the fieldwork resisted male domination directly and indirectly, verbally and non-verbally, because for them any kind of domination was intolerable.

The sin of male domination, visible in social, religious, cultural and political domains, made them re-imagine the tools that they had as women within their own religion and culture to dismantle patriarchy's oppression.

1.2.2 Physically Dismantling Male Domination: A Power Issue

Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid argue that the women who are oppressed in patriarchal structures are not simply victims, but are agents of transformation in society, who could provide vision and hope through their resistance to unjust social structures and existing norms and traditions that oppress them. The liberation theologians are well aware that oppressive social factors dehumanise the poor in society, yet they do not sufficiently address the patriarchal social structure under which many women suffer unjustly in many parts of the world. A major challenge is raised by the three feminist theologians towards the liberation theologians for their emphasis on the poor as a class, which is not inclusive. For the same reason Williams challenges

black male theologians who consider the Exodus story as a paradigm of liberation in which she found it difficult to find liberation in favour of black women. For her, the story of Hagar is a paradigm for the liberation of black oppressed women.[48]

Williams challenges the existing notion of the doctrine of atonement in Christian theological thinking through the religio-cultural and socio-political context of her own people, giving a new vision of how to rethink the death of Jesus on the cross. Williams's theological understanding of surrogacy, especially the coerced surrogacy in the areas of nurturance, field labour and sexuality, the exploitation of black women since slavery, sheds light on rethinking the Christian notion of redemption. In her view neither any kind of religious justification of the death of Jesus nor the way redemption is interpreted in official Christian theological thinking helps to liberate the structural oppression of black women. Instead, Williams claims that Jesus did not die for the sake of sinners but righting relationships and his ministry of healing condemned the existing structural oppression in his time.

Patriarchy, racism and class are the components that come together in appreciating the condition of the black people, and in understanding the Tamil widows. As discussed earlier, the powerful forces in the religio-political system in SL forced/are forcing Tamils along with other minority communities to act according to their decisions and strategies due to which the Tamils are deprived of self-determination. Similar to Williams the widows resist any kind of religious justification of the suffering they undergo as a result of an oppressive system. Instead, widows expect support from their religion to overcome their unjust suffering.

The war-widows who struggle to dismantle the domination of patriarchal society, religion and culture proved that the problems affecting women do not only concern women, and that patriarchy is neither natural nor invincible. The war-widows' new ways of dealing with oppression within the patriarchal structures indicated that their struggle is not only to be a critique of the violence and injustice of the existing structures that dehumanise them, but is also meant to humanise the social structures through transforming silence into action, so that women can live with dignity. As Ivone Gebara says, "… people don't break with tradition, because to do so they have to touch upon things like power … And touching this power is

48 Cf. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 60.

dangerous. I have a feeling it's not going to be the men who touch it, but the women."[49] The following responses offer ample evidence that women take risks of breaking with tradition.

1) "There is no men's work and women's work": The traditional roles of women were changing as war-widows took up new forms of employment. War-widows took risks and crossed the boundaries of 'women's work' in order to face the economic challenges in their lives, expecting equality of both men and women in the workplace. Some of them were involved in risky jobs men did not want to be involved in. They learned new skills to respond to the requirements of the job market. When widows were discriminated against in their workplaces because of their sex/gender/class/ethnicity, they confronted the authorities with the problem. They even challenged the government about its negligence of the economic conditions of war-widows (especially Tamil war-widows).

2) "Being a young woman I too have my needs": The Christian war-widows' responses reveal that many of them did not have the freedom to take decisions regarding their sex life. Being in a culture where women rarely raise the topic of 'sex' in public, as it is a taboo for them to speak about sexual matters with others, some war-widows expressed their experience of breaking the cultural taboos in deciding what was best for themselves.

3) "I am not guilty of breaking some teachings in our religion": Male theology and humanity is restricted to man and expresses only a male view, due to which the oppressive teachings and negative ideas of patriarchy in relation to marriage, divorce, abortion, family planning in the Church are taken as normative. The widows, however, challenged one-sided patriarchal thinking. For example, a Tamil widow who conceived after rape said, "whatever the teachings in my religion be, I did not want to have a child from a man who killed thousands of our people. I would rather go for abortion, than having the child" [Interview number 4: Tamil Christian].

Speaking about the complicated reality of Asian cultures, Uma Narayan spells out the importance of politically analysing women's

49 Ivone Gebara, Quoted by Elina Vuola, *Limits of Liberation: Feminist Theology and Ethics of Poverty and Reproduction* (London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 187.

problems, problems that are relegated to the 'private' sphere because women's problems are considered to be domestic problems. She highlights the need of being critical about culture, rather than being blindly loyal to one's own culture, thinking that regardless of the oppressive elements, respecting one's own culture is essential. Her reflection on culture also indicates the importance of moving away from "a picture of cultural context as sealed rooms, impervious to change, with a homogenous space ..." as there are many ways to inhabit cultures critically and creatively.[50]

There is a saying that "men of quality are not threatened by women's call for equality," nevertheless, many men in Asia fail to realise that women's liberation is a part of the liberation of the whole of humanity. Henriette Katoppo's assertion is, "it is caused by fear – fear of loss of status, fear of what will happen when patriarchal structures mutate, but, basically, fear of the other."[51] Therefore the main challenge for women in Asia is to overcome male domination, while recognising it as a sin, because patriarchy in the Asian context is not just a matter of male supremacy and male centeredness, but also a socio-political and religio-cultural system of control and domination involving powerful over powerless, elite over masses, coloniser over colonised, clergy over laity and employer over employee. In the process of affirming the full humanity of women, the recognition of how a woman's particular context shapes her experience of oppression is not sufficient, it demands alternative ways of resisting elements that support patriarchy: "The stereotyped Asian social landscape must change."[52]

1.3 Seeking New Ways of Reaching Liberation: Creating Context

Liberation/freedom, is a major theme envisioned within the responses of the Christian war-widows. Being in a context, where on the one side women are oppressed based on their gender, ethnicity, religion, class and caste, and on the other side women's struggle for freedom is systematically restrained and their voices are deliberately silenced, the widows are creatively and critically searching for means to dismantle their oppression in their journey towards liberation.

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50 Cf. Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third-World F*eminism (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 9-33.

51 Henriette Katoppo, "Asian Theology: An Asian Woman's Perspective," 144.

52 C.S. Song, *Theology from the Womb of Asia*, 210.

The vast diversity in Asia urges diverse liberative approaches, yet as Orevillo-Montenegro observes, there is a common thread that connects the vision of all who struggle for liberation, that is, "the hope for fullness of life for all peoples."[53] Within the framework of the fullness of life for 'all people', the Asian feminist theologians observe that the inclusion of women in the liberation is systematically neglected or rarely addressed due to patriarchal hegemonies in Asia. The affirmation of the Asian feminist theologians is that any theology from Asia that does not touch the multi-layered oppression of Asian women is limited in scope and cannot liberate any person in Asia, because unless all oppressed women are liberated no one can be liberated. Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park point out clearly: "[U]nless our thoughts as women are known and our voices heard, the work towards rearticulating Christian theology in Asia will remain truncated."[54]

Orevillo-Montenegro, observing the diverse dimensions of cultures in pluralistic Asia, illustrates culture as a powerful tool and resource in doing theology.[55] Living in a religiously pluralistic continent, many Asian feminist theologians have found their own heritage as a new style to present the rich and multi-layered theological voices through symbols, images, songs, dances, stories with the aim of full liberation for all.

Chung Hyun Kyung's analysis of the multi-layered oppression of women from an Asian perspective – Asian philosophy and Korean cultural motifs – helped her to articulate ways of struggling for dignity. To her, feminist theology in Korea must take *han-pu-ri*, survival wisdom, which is expressed through songs, dances and rituals that come from Korean Shamanistic religion, as its purpose and norm, which gives space to the voiceless *minjung* who are the oppressed in Korean society.[56] This Shamanistic ritual offers an opportunity for the voiceless ghosts to tell their stories. In Ahn Sang Nim's view, the importance of *han-pu-ri* is, that the majority of Shamans who play the role of *han-pu-ri*, the majority of

53 Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women*, 54.

54 Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park, "Introduction" in *We Dare to Dream*, ix.

55 Cf. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro, *The Jesus of Asian Women*, 17.

56 Cf. Chung Hyun Kyung, "Han-pu-ri: Doing Theology from Korean Women's Perspective," in *Frontiers in Asian Theology Emerging Trends*, ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 59-61.

people who participate in the *han-pu-ri* ritual and the majority of characters in ghost stories, are women.[57]

The multiplicity of religious heritage that exists and interacts within and among Asians provides resources for a paradigmatic shift in the struggle for liberation. Mary Mananzan, speaking about the liberation of women insists, "this is not an automatic consequence of either economic development or political revolution. In other words, women's movement is an essential aspect of the very process of societal liberation."[58]

1.3.1 Emphasis on Liberation within Daily Life

'Suffering is enough now', 'we need to live in freedom', 'why people cannot understand that we are also human beings like them', 'this is our homeland', 'it is time for us to stand for our needs', are some of the thoughts expressed by the Christian war-widows. The fieldwork explored the innovative ways and means of resisting among Christian war-widows struggling for liberation. Since the unjust social violence is not accidental, the Christian war-widows highlighted the principal need for liberation within the present context. For them, the suffering of the unjust social violence cannot be hidden with the promise of liberation after life, an idea that challenges the traditional redemption language, which emphasises liberation after life – 'eschaton'. Similarly, Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow assert that "if the meaning and purpose of human life is to be found in embodied life on this earth, then many of the ways we have been taught to think about theological questions no longer make sense or provide the orientation we need."[59]

Hardly offering liberating alternatives to the situations of the oppressed, traditional theology does not recognise the struggle for freedom in society as a part of salvation since it is not co-related with the present experience.[60] The absence of the social dimension of sinfulness within the interpretation of sin in the institutional Christian understanding of salvation also leads to the lack of political liberation as an essential element for the

57 Cf. Ahn Sang Nim, "Feminist Theology in the Korean Church," in *We Dare to Dream*, 143.

58 Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 27.

59 Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Goddess and God in the World*, 289.

60 Cf. Daniel J. Simundson, "Suffering" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1992 edition.

fulfilment of salvation. This understanding of soteriology paves the way to viewing human beings as the passive recipients of the act of salvation.

The two liberation theologians, the Protestant theologian and the three feminist theologians and the Christian war-widows, emphasise liberation as holistic, in contrast to the cross-centred soteriology of institutional Christian thinking that leaves out the structurally oppressed. For example, Gustavo Gutiérrez views sin as the root of injustice and exploitation and demands a radical liberation, which necessarily implies a political liberation that is broader than the traditional notion of liberation after life. For him, without liberating historical events, there would be no fulfilment of salvation. The teaching of the institutional Church does not take this level of liberation into consideration.[61] The three Christian feminist theologians argue that until oppressed women are liberated in their society, culture and religion, there cannot be true liberation. Therefore, as Fabella insists, "doing theology as Third World women is a specific way of struggling for life and justice … doing theology demands a commitment to transform reality."[62] The understanding of the widows is that institutional Christian language at present is not co-related with the present experience of struggling communities, instead the believers are forced to view liberation as coming totally from the outside: from God's action in Christ.

In their search for liberation, the Christian war-widows like the three feminist theologians, turn towards their own contexts and utilise their own experience as well as the experience of the oppressed in their communities to break the imposed silence.

1) Life-giving power of war-widows: In the process of overcoming their suffering, widows have become aware of the healing power within themselves: they are not only broken-hearted but also gifted with power to heal the other in sisterly love through sharing and listening. As they expressed: in their 'meeting', whether in the kitchen, a work place, on the road, at a women's association or in the garden, they shared their tears, joy, anger, frustration, fear and hope with the others who also struggle

61 Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 175-176.

62 Virginia Fabella, *Beyond Bonding: A Third World Women's Theological Journey* (Manila: The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians and the Institute of Women's Studies, 1993), 110-111.

to overcome their suffering. As one widow said, "The person who is having the wounds only knows the pain" [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian]. Similar to the experience of war-widows, Brock speaks about the life-giving source of the erotic power of the community, the 'christa community'.[63] For Brock, "the healing through erotic power compels us to be more aware of heart and of possibilities for living in grace," rather than imagining human beings as sinners.[64] As mentioned earlier, this is what happened within the Korean Shamanist tradition, releasing the *han* of the oppressed *minjung* by the Shamanists, which Chung Kyung recognises as the life giving power of women.[65]

The war-widows were connected through different expressions, gestures and actions, which helped them experience healing power among themselves. As Marianne Katoppo claims, among the Asians, "the ties of kinship are still very strong ... Life is not simply my life – it is a part of all others ..."[66] This bond which still remains among war-widows is the life giving power that is much needed in their struggle for full humanity.

"Whatever happens, I used to share it with my friends. Since they too are widows, it is easy for them to understand my life" [Interview number 4: Tamil Christian].

"We have no one at home to share our pains and suffering and also we have no time as we are working like machines from morning until evening. When we come together, we share our pains, frustrations, hopes and anger" [Interview number 1: Tamil Christian].

"We as Tamils, especially as women stand for our rights, especially the right to self-determination; our desire is to live with dignity in our homeland" [Interview number 2: Tamil Christian].

"Despite the barriers from the government, we continue our struggle for our rights as Tamils. This is our land. We have a right to decide what

63 Cf. Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 76.

64 Cf. Ibid., 76.

65 Cf. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 30.

66 Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*, 84.

is best for us. Sinhala government never creates a better society for us Tamils" [Interview number 4: Tamil Christian].

"We need a political solution for the ethnic conflict [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

"I was depressed after the death of my husband. Today I am strong because of my neighbours who strengthened me" [Interview number 8: Sinhala Christian].

"After becoming conscious to the pain of my people, I decided to take an initiative to go to the concentration camp as a group of women whose husbands and children are missing" [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

The war-widows mentioned that in family, society, state, Church, Temple and work place, the voices of women were not heard. The war-widows who were involved in women's associations were positive of the nature of those associations. One widow said:

> I express my ideas, feelings, grievances, for I am assured that I would be accepted and listened to, thus being part of my suffering as we do go through the moments of suffering in life. Not all the questions have answers, yet the freedom of expressing my view is important [Interview number 9: Sinhala Christian].

This freedom to express themselves, created space for becoming conscious of power within and the power of the members in their community, helping them reach one another without any form of hierarchy. For widows, especially the Tamil widows, community had become the centre.

In the view of Brock, the emphasis of the traditional theology remains the dependent relationship of the individual believer with a transcendent Father (*sic*). Brock criticises the liberation theologians for emphasising the historical Jesus as a heroic saviour who defies authority. In her view the liberation theologians still operate with a sin/salvation model of atonement, even though they understand sin as a social dimension. Hence, Brock states that sufferings, which emerge in patriarchy, should be healed within the community through the healing power of its members.[67] In speaking about salvation in relation to the

67 Cf. Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 66-76.

communal practices, Brock asserts, "the restoration of life is never an individual process, even for individuals. When our soteriology focuses on individual subjective states, it falls short of what is necessary to restore right relationships …"[68]

2) Remembering "stories of our people": Memory, the way one remembers, is an important element among Sri Lankans in the cultural, religious and political spheres. The responses of the Christian war-widows revealed that remembering is an essential factor in their personal lives, something which is also political. Nevertheless, the freedom to 'remember' is drastically different between the Tamils and the Sinhalese due to the unsolved ethnic conflict between them. The widows of the Sinhala soldiers, along with the government, officially remember and celebrate the 'war-victory', considering their husbands to be war-heroes, and the national heritage of the Sinhalese and their tradition. The Tamils, however, in the absence of freedom and amidst the strategic silencing of 'remembering' had to find creative ways, or innovate alternative ways of 'remembering'.

In many Asian cultures, telling stories is a major tool in remembering: "story-telling has been the chief means of passing wisdom from one generation of women to the other."[69] Similarly, the war-widows use their own stories and stories of their people as a powerful tool to communicate their past experiences. Once I went to interview a Tamil widow. She was keeping flowers before some photographs and lighting an oil lamp. When she had finished, she began explaining about the persons in the photos while revealing what happened to her husband, her three children and her parents during the last days of the war and how she happened to live without her family members.

One Tamil war-widow found the courage to share her personal experience of being raped by a Sinhala soldier:

> I don't think that you, Sinhalese know how the Sinhala soldiers treated Tamil women during the war and even in the aftermath. It was terrible.

68 Rita Nakashima Brock, "Communities of the Cross: Christa and the Communal Nature of Redemption," in *Feminist Theology* (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage Publications), 123.

69 Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 40.

> I was raped by soldiers and I also know about many stories of our women. Some of them are scared to reveal them [Interview number 4: Tamil Christian].[70]

The remembrance of war-widows takes place at their homes, in neighbouring houses, in schools, work places, in women's associations, or at a protest march in the public domain. For Tamils, story-telling is a means of resistance to the deliberate silencing of the Tamils. They therefore keep history [her story] alive through the revelation of their stories of the past in order to prevent a repetition of the massacre. A widow said,

> no one can erase our past memories by destroying our cemeteries. We daily remember our people who died in war and who fought for our rights. The daughters and sons who died in the war are heroes for us [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

In the process of storytelling, the war-widows conveyed their inner feelings, aspirations and meanings. As Chung asserts, "the power of story-telling lies in its embodied truth. Women talk about their concrete, historical life experience and not about abstract, metaphysical concepts."[71]

The fieldwork also revealed how the widows spoke about liberating dimensions of their communities in the past while sharing their stories, because it could be a way of planting ideas and thoughts in the minds of the listeners, including children, that emphasise the need of learning from past experiences. They would, for example, relate how the Tamil women were brave enough to join the LTTE, when their own culture, language and their right to homeland were threatened by the Sinhala centric government, thus breaking the myths of women in their society and even challenging the inferior status of women, the caste system and the dowry system in Tamil society. Some of these issues came up during the fieldwork. Speaking about emancipation of women in a situation of being under the control of armed forces demands courage, yet they reiterated their political rights and equal dignity, as opposed to during the time of the LTTE.

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70 See page 155.

71 Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again,* 104.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in her work *In Memory of Her*, while deconstructing the *kyriarchal*[72] central perspective of memory laid down by male theologians, reconstructs history from the perspective of wo/men.[73] According to Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, Schüssler Fiorenza "decentralises memory in the singular in favour of a location of marginal memories in the plural. She brings marginalised perspectives into the centre. This centre she locates in the idea of wo/men."[74] The vision of the *ekklēsia* of wo/men is the struggle for change and liberation of God's life-giving and transforming power of community in the midst of the structural sin of the *kyriarchal* powers of exploitation and dehumanisation. The memory of war-widows is a counter product to the dominant, one-sided stories in the country. Being in a country where the history is written and interpreted by the male, where oppressive and dominant groups exist, the war-widows dismantle the power of the oppressor over oppressed through revealing their memory of the past. The same challenge could be applied

72 "A neologism coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and derived from the Greek words for 'lord' or 'master' (kyrios) and 'to rule or dominate' (archein) which seeks to redefine the analytic category of patriarchy in terms of multiplicative intersecting structures of domination. *Kyriarchy* is a social-political system of domination in which elite educated propertied men hold power over women and other men. *Kyriarchy* is best theorized as a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social structures of super ordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression." Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 211.

73 Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian* Origins (New York: Orbis Books, 2001). This way of writing woman/women proposed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is meant to indicate that, "the category 'wo/man-wo/men' is a social construct. Wo/men are not a unitary social group but are fragmented by structures of race, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, colonialism, and age. This destabilisation of the term 'wo/men' underscores the difference between wo/men and within individual wo/men. This writing is inclusive of subaltern men who in *kyriarchal* systems are seen 'as wo/men' and functions as a linguistic corrective to androcentric language use." Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways,* 216.

74 Hedwig Meyer-Wilmes, "Tango con Pasión: Memory as the Central Element of a Hermeneutic of Space," in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 79.

to the existing theologies in SL, as A. Pieris claims: "since theology is essentially an 'interpretation of the memory'[75] of a liberational experience, it is invariably a liberation theology; there cannot be a theology that is not liberational."[76] The challenge is how the memories of war-widows will be interpreted within the existing theologies, including the liberation theologies in SL in order to give attention to and liberate the oppressed war-widows.

3) Speaking through 'silence': Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis speaks about silence as 'a new meaning to resistance and liberation' in the context of Asian culture, that has been used by some women as a resource for survival.[77] This idea could be supported by James Scott who interprets 'hidden transcripts' as "a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning or to shield the identity of the actors."[78] His understanding is that hidden transcripts – rumours, folktales, jokes, dances, songs – are always present in the public discourse of subordinate groups, and therefore, recovery of the non-hegemonic voices and practices of the subordinate fundamentally differs from the recovery of the voices of the elite. Scrutinising the ways in which silence is used as a means of resistance by the Asian women, Rita Brock argues that silence is also an active strategy and that silence is not always the absence of communication, but can be a way of connecting more deeply.[79]

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75 According to Aloysius Pieris, there are three moments in the evolution of any religion: (1) Primordial experience of liberation, which gives birth to a religion; (2) Its collective Memory (written and oral); and (3) Its contextual interpretation at popular, philosophical and political level. Cf. Aloysius Pieris, *The Genesis of an Asian Theology of Liberation: An Autobiographical Excursus on the Art of Theologizing in Asia* (Kelaniya: Tulana Research Centre, 2013), 21-11.

76 Aloysius Pieris, *The Genesis of an Asian Theology of Liberation*, 18.

77 Cf. Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis, "On Naming Justice: The Spiritual and Political Connection in Violence," in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth,* 484.

78 James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 15.

79 Cf. Rita Nakashima Brock, "Interstitial Integrity: Reflections toward an Asian American Woman's Theology," in *Introduction to Christian Theology: Contemporary North American Perspectives*, ed. Roger A. Badham (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 192.

The general understanding of silence is associated with passivity, victimhood and lack of agency, especially in the context of Asian women, due to the negative portrayal of women as silent and passive. Even though silence could hide realities, pains, shame, the explorations of the fieldwork revealed that silence also can be seen as a part of resistance.

> Our women's movement in the village as a group decided to boycott the last election as we were aware that no Sinhalese regime would listen to our demands.. [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian].

> We publicly demonstrated against the government for the continual injustice doing to us. It was a silent protest as we all strapped our mouths, holding banners we expressed our demands [Interview number 4: Tamil Christian].

I was invited by one of the correspondents of the research sample during the fieldwork to attend their weekly meeting. The widows were called to express their feelings freely as a part of their inter-religious prayer service in the beginning of the meeting. A young widow, who expressed her feelings by way of a Tamil cultural dance, first began to express her pain and struggle through different movements. The dance ended with the movements that expressed her anger and it was surprising to see that some widows in the group joined her without any invitation, and there was a moment of silence: they cried, laughed and held each other. I experienced a strong resistance to suffering and hope and strength for transformation. There were no words heard in the above described reactions of Tamil war-widows, yet their silence, the absence of words made the resistance of war-widows to their suffering more eloquent. Silence, entangled with tears, gestures and expressions, was a powerful response of many war-widows during the fieldwork as they communicated their anger, frustration, pain and hope.

The explorations of the fieldwork revealed the powerful voice of silence. The silence of the war-widows, their cries, dances, expressions speak not only to the fellow-sufferers but also to the oppressors. For widows, silence is also a strategy of survival. Emerging within the active silence of the war-widows is resistance, disagreement and at the same time also an experience of freedom and liberation. This leads to the question whether or not the Churches in SL take the liberative cultural practices seriously? Do the existing theologies in SL recognise and give a rightful place to the hidden transcripts of widows as part of resistance to and

disagreement with the prevailing structures? The greatest challenge is, do the theologies in SL see life and reality in their full spectrum?

4) Collective struggle for freedom: Sandra Cheldelin, has no doubt that women and children are adversely affected by war and its aftermath, yet "the dominant narrative … that women have one paramount role in the story of war – overwhelmingly as the victim, must be changed."[80] Her view is that this narrative has limitations as it could ignore how women's lives change as a result of war, their traumatic experiences and how women have forged creative strategies to resist their oppressive situations.[81] 'Alternative society building' is a praxis exercised by war widows where no hierarchical structures prevail, as it was constructed through the struggle towards a democratic dream community by forming alternative societal structures like the grassroots movement. The war-widows, while breaking the social myth, "woman's place is in the home, where as man's place is in the society," crossed from the 'private' sphere to the 'public' sphere through their various involvements in women's associations. As Virginia Fabella suggests, "women from the base are the best equipped to speak on Third World reality …"[82]

Being in a society where leadership, decision-making and the public domain are the privilege of men, coming together as a group without male leadership is itself a message that widows are not mere victims: they are also the agents of social transformation. The women's movements were a safety net for war-widows to accomplish their task and the place where hope was assured. The fieldwork indicated that this was the place where women came together and discussed their problems and aspirations, took decisions, stood together for their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their community, where they challenged the oppressive groups who controlled them and overcame their economic barriers as a small scale group.

5) The divine: For war-widows, salvation is also a political action, which goes beyond the overly emphasised religious or spiritual value. The liberation that the Christian war-widows speak about is broader than the traditional notion of liberation. It is also broader than the view of the liberation theologians whose main emphasis is on class analysis. Williams

80 Sandra I. Cheldelin, "Gender and Conflict: What Do We Know?," 34.

81 Cf. Ibid., 34.

82 Virginia Fabella, *Beyond Bonding*, 111.

states that as the black communities are engaged in a terrible struggle for life and wellbeing, all their talk about God must translate into action that can help their people live.[83] She further suggests that in the story of Hagar in the Bible, Hagar views God as the One who sustains and empowers to survive.[84] As Christ and Plaskow insist, traditional images of God who rules the world from the outside fail to affirm diversity and difference, while legitimising domination and oppression.[85] Similarly, in their struggle for liberation, war-widows found new names of and places for God, who empowers them to resist their suffering.

• **A Feminine God**: The findings suggested that both masculine and feminine qualities of God experienced by war-widows are contrary to the traditional teachings that emphasise the masculine attributes of God: "God was with me throughout my life as a loving mother" [Interview number 10: Sinhala Christian]. If women are to see themselves as creatures made in the divine image, that is, primary identity as image of God, the language used to speak of God must reflect more than male symbolism, because language is not politically neutral, but rather serves as a tool of empowerment or oppression. As Chung Hyun Kyung claims, "Asian women's yearning for and rediscovery of a Godhead that contains both male and female qualities is the same yearning for full humanity in which both males and females are fully respected as equal partners."[86]

• **God of Life**: A small percentage of war-widows, while moving beyond sexist language, spoke about God as a universal life-giving power that leads them to choose life. The power is not to dominate or oppress the 'other', but to generate life from within. If God is the God of life, the God who is also feminine joins the struggle of war-widows who want to make life possible. "I feel that God is some kind of power within me that directs me to do good" [Interview number 9: Sinhala Christian].

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83 Cf. Chung Hyun Kyung, "To Be Human is to Be Created in God's Image," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1994), 253.

84 Cf. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness, 24-30.*

85 Cf. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Goddess and God in the World*, 287-288.

86 Chung Hyun Kyung, "To Be Human is to Be Created in God's Image," 253.

• **The God of Mullivaikkal**:[87] Tamil war-widows expressed that the God who they encountered in "Mullivaikkal" is a God who struggled with them against the oppressor who made every effort to eliminate Tamils and their dream of living as a distinct nation. They revealed that their God did not want them to suffer; instead, God was with them in their struggle to affirm the dignity of Tamils, the oppressed in general and women in particular. War-widows have realised that their suffering is not deserved or willed by God, but the will of God is to overcome the suffering of domination

> The effort of GoSL was to eliminate our Tamil people as a distinct nation. As a survivor of 'Mullivaikkal' I would say that we experienced the powerful presence of God who struggled with us and still struggling to overcome the continuation of the massacre in the post-war situation with unconquerable will to freedom [Interview number 6: Tamil Christian].

Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow state that since the meaning and purpose of human life has to be found in this world, the divinity too has to be found in this world, not the next: a "theological process in bodies, relationships, communities, histories, and the web of life."[88] In the view of Williams, black women following the tradition of Hagar, used political strategies in their struggle for liberation, seeing God as involved in their survival struggle, in their struggle for a quality of life.[89] Hence, those black women experienced a God who willed transformation of their lives, she argues.

6) Crossing barriers of 'otherness': Being conscious of the pain and the suffering of the 'other', some war-widows have crossed the barriers of 'otherness' that separated them for many years. As the fieldwork indicated, the Sinhala Christian war-widows become acquainted with the Sinhala Buddhists and the Tamil Christians with Hindus and in some places both groups got an opportunity to work with Muslim women. Their inter-religious and inter-ethnic gathering, dialogue, sharing, worship have helped to extend their solidarity for the common goal of working together for liberation. Nevertheless, the fieldwork also revealed that crossing

87 "Mullivaikkal," which is known among Tamils as the final "killing field" of the war is an area on the North-eastern coast of the island where thousands of Tamils were massacred during the last phase of the war between the GoSL and the LTTE.

88 Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, *Goddess and God in the World*, 288.

89 Cf. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 6.

ethnic barriers between Sinhalese and Tamils was limited. A few Christian war-widows who crossed the Sinhala-Tamil barriers are a great challenge to the Christian Churches in SL, especially the Churches in the South, which do not take the ethnic issue in the country seriously.

Hope lies in the fact that the Christian war-widows have begun organising themselves autonomously to make their voices heard: emergence of hope in the midst of suffering. For them, salvation begins the very moment they reject and resist their oppression as widows. The salvation the Christian war-widows speak about is a total and concrete reality. It is the salvation of the whole person in the present context. Alleviating suffering here and now is the priority, and understanding the challenges posed by the widows to the existing theologies in SL brings a new dimension to theology.

2. New Theological Challenges Arising from the Struggle of Buddhist War-Widows

As discussed in the second chapter, the Buddhist war-widows in the research sample were all Sinhalese and except one all were the wives of soldiers of the GoSL. Sinhala Buddhists being the majority, claim the country to be 'Sinhala Buddhist' with phrases such as 'this is the island of the Buddha', 'this is the land of *dhamma*', and 'country of the Buddhists'. The experience of Buddhist war-widows in the post-war context where the GoSL declared the 'war-victory' in 2009, designating the armed forces as the 'heroes of the island and religion', is different from the experience of Tamil Christians and even the Sinhala Christians due to their connection with Christianity. Apart from these facts, being wives of soldiers and belonging to the majority in the country, the Buddhist war-widows were socially, culturally and religiously marginalised due to their womanhood/widowhood and due to other social factors. The next endeavour was to reflect and explore the challenging responses of the war-widows to the existing Buddhist philosophies in SL, comparing the reflections of the three engaged Buddhist thinkers – Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa and Bernard Glassman and the three Buddhist feminist thinkers – Dhammanandā, Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Rita Gross.

2.1 Dismantling Discrimination against Women

The women, regarded as subordinate in patriarchy, theoretically acknowledge that women in Buddhist societies are more independent and free than women in other societies, mainly due to the reason that there is no gender discrimination in Buddhism as it teaches that the enlightened mind is neither male nor female.[90] Nevertheless, practically speaking, the Buddhist war-widows participating in the fieldwork found the existing patriarchal social structures to discriminate against women and generating suffering. This theme, which was highlighted within the explorations of the fieldwork is common in the Asian context and it paved the way to a discussion of the challenges put forward by the war-widows in their ways of dealing with suffering compared to the reflection of the three engaged Buddhist thinkers and the three Buddhist feminist thinkers.

In many countries of Asia, child marriages are still practised, female foetuses are still aborted, women are persecuted for giving birth to girls and girls are brought up with the view that their main aim is to get married, live in obedience to the husband and to have children. Allison Goodwin asserts, "at present, the vast majority of Buddhist orders throughout Asia teach that women are inferior to men and have more weaknesses and karmic obstructions. These organizations also discriminate against women in rituals and policies, and so, through their words and actions, teach their followers and cultures to do the same."[91] In the view of David R. Loy, from the religious point of view, a large part of the problem is that women are polluted and polluting due to their association with blood (menstruation and childbirth), moreover, their role as temptress and seducer is an uncontrollable threat to the chastity of ascetic men trying to follow a spiritual path.[92] For Goodwin, these discriminatory views and practices are "the antithesis of Right View, and they undermine the Middle

90 Cf. Diana Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985), 236.

91 Allison A. Goodwin, "Right View, Red Rust, and While Bones: A Reexamination of Buddhist Teachings on Female Inferiority," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 19 (January, 2012): 202.

92 Cf. David R. Loy, "The Karma of Women,": http://www.jonathantan.org/handouts/buddhism/Loy-Karma_of_Women.pdf (accessed 20 September 2016).

Path by perpetuating identification with concepts of independent, constant, inherently existing selves and others (*attā/ātman*), and discriminatory thinking."[93]

This is despite the fact that there are four types of both positive and negative attitudes towards women and the feminine recorded in Buddhist literature, namely: soteriological inclusiveness, institutional androcentrism, ascetic misogyny and soteriological androgyny – the emphasis is on the negative attitudes.[94] The positive attitude toward women in the Buddhist literature, the inclusion of women in attaining liberation, the ultimate goal in Buddhism, and the sexual and gender irrelevance in the path of liberation is hidden and less-known due to the over-emphasis on negative attitudes.[95] Alan Sponberg insists that after the death of the Buddha, the community, while turning into 'an established coenobitic monastic residence' and a male hierarchical Buddhist institution, became powerful and subordinated women. This narrow vision of women leads to the ascetic misogyny seen in Buddhist literature. For monks, the nature of women is as an active agent of distraction: "women are ever the root of ruin, and of loss and substance; when men are controlled by women how can they gain happiness? ... A woman is the destruction of destructions in this world and the next; hence one must ever avoid women if he desires happiness for himself."[96] The roots of ascetic misogyny go back to pre–Buddhist culture.

The discrimination against women in Buddhism has to be understood from its roots in the Vedic period. Indian society underwent many radical changes during the latter part of the Vedic period, where the Brahmin priests were offered a high position of supreme power. The honoured position and the higher status of women began to decline due to the emergence of the negative ideas of Brahmanas towards women. The Nārada-dharmaśāstras explains, "a woman was created to bear children. Therefore a wife is a farm, and a husband is a sower. A farm should be

93 Ibid., 274.

94 Cf. Alan Sponberg, "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism," in *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón (Delhi: D.K. Fine Arts Press, 1992), 3-29.

95 Cf. Alan Sponberg, "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism," in *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, 3-29.

96 *Śiksā Samuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine,* trans. Cecil Bendal and W.H.D. Rouse (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1971), 77.

bestowed on the person who owns seed" (IX-19). Even though Buddhism arose in response to the Brahmanical culture developing in India in the middle of the first millennium BCE, the misogynist view of the Brahmin culture towards women is still prevalent within the Buddhist texts and Buddhist societies in Asia. The reason was, as Masatoshi Ueki states, "after Gautama Buddha's death, the view of women in Hindu society began gradually to seep into the Buddhist order."[97] In the androcentric model of humanity and patriarchy in the Asian context, women are objectified and any consideration of issues dealing with women is seen as irrelevant.

Nevertheless, Allison Goodwin claims that attitudes toward women in many Asian Buddhist countries have become more liberal over the past century, as Buddhist activists and progressive Buddhist leaders and organisations in Buddhist societies play important roles in this process of change.[98] For example, the practice of sand *mandala*-making and *thangka*-painting, two sacred art forms in Tibetan Buddhist context by nuns in Kathmandu is a courageous and a challenging step to expand their meditative practices into an area previously practised by monks and men. Melissa Kerin observes, "the Keydong nuns' new role as creators of *thangkas* and *mandalas* radically alters this dichotomy; women are no longer left on the periphery, but are now learning the texts and skills necessary to competently and skilfully create these sacred images."[99] Similarly, Ellison Findly contends, "in contemporary settings, women are playing a significant and even decisive role in the way the forms, practices, and institutions of Buddhism are changing to meet the needs and demands of life in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century culture."[100]

2.1.1 Naming the Discrimination against Women

The discrimination against women in Buddhist society is not an isolated issue as it is inter-connected with the spiritual, social, cultural

97 Masatoshi Ueki, *Gender Equality in Buddhism* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001), 33.

98 Cf. Allison A. Goodwin, "Right View, Red Rust, and While Bones: A Reexamination of Buddhist Teachings on Female Inferiority," 202.

99 Melissa Karen, "From Periphery to Centre: Tibetan Women's Journey to Sacred Artistry," in *Women's Buddhism and Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*, ed. Ellison Banks Findly (Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2000), 323.

100 Ellison Findly, Introduction to *Women's Buddhism and Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*, ed. Ellison Banks Findly (Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2000), 5.

spheres. I.B. Honor argues that, despite the equal spiritual path given by the Buddha to all without any gender discrimination, the status of Buddhist nuns is lower to the monks' status.[101] Being influenced by the three types of obedience and five woes for women that were prescribed in the Hindu code, the Buddhist women are oppressed in their family life, says Masatoshi Ueki.[102] K.R. Blackstone discusses the prevailing cultural perceptions of women in Buddhist society, "they lack physical, social and psychological containment, for their bodies ooze and they maintain close personal ties with family and they can never assume a position of superiority either with the sangha or as a representative of the sangha before the laity."[103] Similarly, the fieldwork revealed that the Buddhist war-widows were controlled and dominated by oppressive teachings, customs and rules based on the misinterpretation of Buddhist texts and the existing misogynist views of women.

Identifying and naming the cause of suffering by its specific name is an important element to overcome suffering in Buddhism. The discrimination against women was recognised and named by the war-widows as a major element within Sri Lankan Buddhist society, which is patriarchal, dominated by a male hierarchical Buddhist institution. Hence, living in a Buddhist society, where the Buddhist teachings speak about the equal spiritual path without gender discrimination, the Buddhist war-widows were critical about gender inequality between men and women in their society and culture precisely because it is contrary to the teachings of the Buddha. The findings indicated that the cultural expectations of women, which are influenced by Buddhism, are drastically different from the expectations of men. This was the same when one became a widow or widower, as was expressed by the widows in their critical understanding of widowhood.

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101 Cf. I.B. Honor, *Women under Primitive Buddhism* (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd, 1930), 291.

102 Cf. Masatoshi Ueki, *Gender Equality in Buddhism*, 55.

103 K.R. Blackstone, *Standing Outside the Gate: Study of Women's Ordination in the Pali Vinaya*, Doctoral Dissertation (Hamilton: McMaster University, 1995), 226: https://macsphere.mcmaster.ca/bitstream/11375/6964/1/fulltext.pdf (accessed 2 September 2016).

"All the customs, rituals and rules are only for us women, but not for men" [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

"Wherever we go there is discrimination" [Interview number 15: Sinhala Buddhist].

"Men have freedom but women are controlled by rules" [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

"We have no freedom to decide what is good for us. Men decide everything" [Interview number 16: Sinhala Buddhist].

"Our people have the notion that we as women always have to obey men" [Interview number 17: Sinhala Buddhist].

The Buddhist widows expressed that since they are Sinhala-Buddhists in SL, the patriarchal social and religious hierarchy expects all women, including widows, to follow customs, rules and rituals without questioning them and to believe that Sinhala culture should be protected by Buddhists in SL. Even though the Buddhist war-widows were forced to remain within the patriarchal demands of cultures, the responses of widows indicated that they were not ready to be victims of their own cultures, instead they expect to affirm the dignity of women and widows in their cultures even if it reinforces negative social attitudes towards women or generates suffering in their lives, their reaction is to resist all harmful cultural demands.

From the point of view of three Buddhist feminist thinkers – Dhammanandā, Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Rita Mary Gross – discrimination against women is a matter of ignorance, which connects with all the root causes of suffering in the view of Buddhism. They state that the androcentric models of humanity that put men at the centre of attention or that favour masculinity over femininity, regard men as normal and women as exceptions to the norm; men as rightful leaders and women as subservient to men, there to help men maintain their status and positions that society values.[104] Karma Lekshe Tsomo points out that women are excluded from leadership roles and decision-making, and the access to full ordination. Nevertheless, the Buddha established a religious community

104 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 19-20.

of laywomen, laymen, ordained nuns and monks with equal spiritual capacity. For the three feminist thinkers, suffering generated by gender discrimination against women is therefore their focus. For Gross, the real suffering of sexism is the true problem rather than male dominance, which is the more unfortunate result of the suffering of sexism. Gross asserts that "the patriarchal prison of gender roles not only teaches that women are not quite real human beings; it also teaches that women should willingly accept having their reality named for them by others."[105]

The widows exposed the division between the 'men's world' and the 'women's world' which leads women to remain within the family sphere as mothers and wives with the functions of caring and nurturing. Buddhist women in SL are viewed in association with their male partners and valued for their roles as mothers and chaste wives. The war widows challenged the views in Sinhala Buddhist culture, which are supported by the Buddhist institution in SL. They promote more restrictions on women in their roles as daughters, wives, mothers and widows, said some widows.

> When I decided to go for a job, my parents strongly opposed it since I have two children [Interview number 13: Sinhala Buddhist].

> When my husband was alive, when my children made mistakes, he always used to blame me thinking that I am the only responsible person for the wellbeing of my children [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

The ideal woman within the patriarchal view is a loyal, chaste wife and mother. Even though Buddhism is not pro-natalist in its views, and does not consider biological reproduction as a religious requirement, many Buddhists try to limit women's reproductive freedom. Women are forced to bear children without any consent on their part. Gross notes that the literal mother in Buddhism is not a spiritually valued model. It is not idealised because of the suffering resulting from motherhood, yet motherhood as a symbol is highly regarded in the androcentric social construction. Reiko Ohnuma examines motherly love as a potent, recurring symbol in South Asian Buddhist literature. In her view, on the one hand, Buddhist literature often idealises motherly-love as the purest, most compassionate type of

105 Rita M. Gross, *Soaring and Settling: Buddhist Perspectives on Contemporary Social and Religious Issues* (New York: Continuum Publishing company, 1998), 9.

love.[106] On the other hand, Ohnuma says, "when mother-love is considered not as a symbol, but as an actual entity, it is often condemned in Buddhist texts as being a manifestation of desire, attachment, and clinging – all negative emotions in Buddhism that keep one bound within the realm of samsara."[107]

The subordination of women has been justified by the "five woes" in Buddhist texts, which were highly influenced by the notion that 'women are subjected to five woes' according to the teachings of *Manu Dharmaśāstra*. Dhammanandā states that unless Buddhist society is ready to accept that certain passages of the Canon clearly bear the Indian social and cultural values that were highly influenced by Brahmanism, no one can change wrong ideologies perpetuated against women.[108]

The three Buddhist feminist thinkers highlight the daily experiences of women in different societies as an important source for their philosophical thinking. The three engaged Buddhist thinkers – Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa and Bernard Glassman – similarly to the three feminist thinkers are aware that suffering is not an isolated phenomenon as it is inter-connected with the social structures. For example, Sivaraksa begins his analysis on suffering by acknowledging suffering from both sides: suffering of the oppressed and the oppressor, employer and employee, and people in general, because he thinks that it is important to understand the different causes that generate suffering.[109] Thich Nhat Hanh states that it is essential to take time to think deeply to recognise the cause of suffering in order to call suffering by its specific name. These engaged Buddhist

106 Cf. *Sutta Nipāta,* vv, 149-150, in The Group of Discourses (*Sutta Nipāta*), trans. K.R. Norman (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1996), 1:25. According to the text, the Buddha's loving kindness for all beings is compared to the mother's love for her own son, her only son, because sons in premodern Asia were more highly valued than daughters.

107 Reiko Ohnuma, "Mother-Love and Mother-Grief: South Asian Buddhist Variation on a Theme," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Spring, 2007): 98.

108 Cf. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991), 23-26.

109 Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, "Buddhism in a World of Change," in *Engaged Buddhist Reader: Ten Years of Engaged Buddhist Publishing*, ed. Arnold Kotler (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1996), 71.

thinkers do, however, not often identify and name male domination over women as a major factor that creates suffering for women, despite the fact that they do identify suffering as the outcome of unjust social, political and economic structures.

Speaking about the exclusion of the experience of the oppression of women in Buddhist society, Gross claims that the engaged Buddhist movement has been slow to recognise that suffering of sexism is something they should essentially deal with. It is surprising to see the silence of those who work for justice in economic and political spheres on the issue of sexism and gender justice.[110] Ouyporn Khuankaew, speaking about violence against women, which is the worst form of violence in her view, states, "but one thing that has never been mentioned, even by progressive monks, Buddhist male scholars or activists, is patriarchy within Buddhism itself."[111]

The most prevalent trend in Buddhism with regard to the gender issue is trying to ignore the problem, saying that "enlightened mind is neither male nor female, but beyond gender," says Gross. This notion has led many women to acquiesce to male dominance, rather than trying to change the oppressive patriarchal structures. For Gross, the problem is not the enlightened mind, but the main problem is the male dominated institution. Hence, she claims that in Buddhism there is an intolerable contradiction between the view: gender-neutral and gender free and, practice: male domination over women.[112] Therefore, instead of ignoring the issues that oppress women, Gross affirms the need of bringing them to light to overcome suffering generated by gender inequality.

The understanding and naming of male domination by its specific name helped war-widows resist and dismantle male domination over them in their culture, religion and society. Similar to the view of the three feminist thinkers, the hope of war-widows was that harmful traditional practices and views on women could be changed through new influences. The following response of a widow represents the hope shared by many war-widows.

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110 Cf. Ibid., 69-70.

111 Ouyporn Khuankaew, "Feminism and Buddhism: A Reflection through Personal Life and Working Experience," *Think Sangha Journal* 2 (1999): 168.

112 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion*, 71.

> Earlier I thought that changing our Buddhist culture was unimaginable as it constituted an integral part of social life. My experience of suffering within the oppressive aspects of culture changed my thinking pattern: we can change our culture. We make cultures and we have the power to change the cultures if it does not fit us [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

2.1.2 Challenging Discrimination against Women

Being conscious of the fact that in many societies women are silenced by men due to a perception of them as a threat, Dhammanandā emphasises the need of developing an unlearning process for women to transcend suffering. She emphasises the need to reveal the hidden liberative stories of women in the Buddhist tradition, unlearning the influence of Indian patriarchal culture concealed in many of the Buddhist teachings as well as overcoming the barriers that exclude women from the Buddhist spiritual path. Furthermore she asserts that "sex should not be a way for men to express power over women, or something that only men enjoy and women submit to."[113] Gross argues that "we need to do whatever it takes to undermine the assumption that *gender* is a women's issue, is another term that can be used interchangeably with *women*. Until then, the paradigm shift in models of humanity ... will still be incomplete."[114]

The Buddhist war-widows while revealing their oppression within culture and religion insisted that they were not ready to be victims of their own cultures, instead their desire was to affirm the dignity of women and widows in their cultures regardless of the consequences. As widows shared their stories, it appeared that some of them had even followed the oppressive customs and rules in their society unquestioningly, yet their present experience makes them aware of how much they suffer from existing cultural violence. While affirming the dignity of women, they challenge harmful cultural norms, rituals and rules. Many of the Buddhist war-widows question if the spiritual path of the Buddha is common to all regardless of sex, why there is discrimination against women due to their sex?

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113 Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, "A Vision of Dharmic Society: A Buddhist Woman's Perspective": http://www.inebnetwork.org/thinksangha/tsangha/chatsumarndsbook.html (accessed 17 May 2015).

114 Rita M. Gross, *A Garland of Feminist Reflections: Forty Years of Religious Exploration* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009), 69.

1) 'Women are not the sexual property of men': The common practice in SL is that the husband takes ownership of the wife's sexuality within wedlock and becomes the one who possesses her body: the woman is his sexual property. Buddhists revealed that men in their cultures extend their dominant role beyond family life and try to take advantage of them, thinking that women are ready for sexual relationships at any time.

> One day, my child was not well and I happened to ask a neighbour's vehicle to take him to a doctor. He came and helped me, but after a week he was telling me that he wanted to come to me when my child goes to school. I firmly refused him. Then he threatened me, but I said 'no'. You have to be very careful when you get any help from men, because very often they expect something in return [Interview number 13: Sinhala Buddhist].

Some Buddhist widows of soldiers challenged the harassments done to them by some of the male military officers while they go to them to get official matters done:

> Once when I went to an officer to get a document he asked me to come after five days without any reason. When I asked him why he was asking me to come again and again, he said that until he gets a positive reaction from me to his 'proposal'. I got angry and immediately made a complaint to the head office against the officer. I am not scared of anyone [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

A significant number of men in many societies are inclined to blame women for their sexual temptations. Dhammanandā says that, instead of taking the responsibility and controlling their fantasies, they view women as sex objects, which implies that it is natural: 'natural' to pursue women to the point of coercion or cruelty. As A. Pieris states, "feminism is a way of handling the subliminal fear that makes males exercise power over women as well as over nature."[115] The challenging responses of war-widows revealed that instead of remaining silent in the midst of dehumanisation, they were strong enough to denounce the expectation of men that widows in the absence of their husbands should be available to fulfil sexual desires.

2) 'A woman can also survive without a man': The Buddhist widows explained that in their own religion the feminine is seen as sensual, destructive and weak. The men in their society consider it their main

115 Aloysius Pieris, *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (New York, Orbis Books, 1996), 14.

responsibility to keep women under their control. According to the widows, this is the main reason for the control and oppression of women by parents, brothers or male relatives, especially regarding issues of remarriage, occupation and living alone without a male family member. The responses of war-widows critically dealt with the idea that women are a weaker sex and need to be protected by men who are stronger than women.

> When I was at home I was controlled by my father, then by my husband, at least now I should have the freedom to decide about my life. We all should ask that from whom men try to protect us? I need my independence [Interview number 15: Sinhala Buddhist].

> Please don't misunderstand me. When I was with my husband, who was an army commander, my house was like a camp. He was very strict. I have freedom now to do what is good for me [Interview number 16: Sinhala Buddhist].

The fieldwork found that there were some widows who purposely wanted to remain single to affirm that they, as women, have the capacity to live without a male partner: life without a husband is quite possible.

> My parents always ask me to remarry since I am still young, thinking that they cannot die in peace leaving me 'alone' as they think that the life of a woman without a man is impossible. When I wanted to marry, I married but now I feel I can live even without a man. This is my choice [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

As discussed in the fourth chapter, in *Therigatha*, a collection of verses of the early *bhikkuni-s* in canonical Buddhist text, explains *bhikkhuni-s*' quest for the ultimate religious goal while renouncing the worldly life expected from them by patriarchal society, namely, to marry, bear children and obey the husband.

3) 'The place of the married woman is not only her home': The explorations of the fieldwork recognised how the war-widows resisted to a strong myth prevailing in their communities; a good wife and a good mother is typified by one who remains at home while taking care of children and husband. 'Motherhood' is a key concept the culture places on a high pedestal, yet ironically the same social structures control women irrespective of their roles. Many Buddhist widows expressed their desire to associate with different groups of people in society as they have recognised

that women's world cannot be restricted to the family. In their new roles as breadwinners and decision-makers, Buddhist war-widows have begun to rethink the model of motherhood imposed on them within their patriarchal Buddhist structures.

> As our men in society, we also have a right to associate with different people in our society, we cannot remain at home being restricted to the nurturing and caring functions of our children. This awareness made me to work with some women's group in the society [Interview number14: Sinhala Buddhist].

> Even though I get the pension of my husband from the government, I am doing a job because I would like to move with other people. When my husband was alive, he did not allow me to work saying that a mother should always be with the children [Interview number16: Sinhala Buddhist].

4) 'Motherhood cannot be used to oppress us': Motherhood is generally seen as inseparably linked with fixed supremely virtuous qualities such as nurturing, sacrifice, love and tolerance, the violations of which are considered unwomanly. The widows have begun to evaluate and resist the oppression of women that occurs through a degrading understanding of motherhood.

> When I decided to remarry, I said to the man whom I was about to marry that I do not want raise children. He said that a woman who does not want to raise a child cannot be considered as a virtuous woman. They think that we women are child producing machines. According to him, there cannot be a married life without children. I rejected the proposal [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

A Buddhist war-widow expressed her own feelings about her motherhood being misused for national propaganda during the war:

> We as the Sinhala mothers who sent our children to the military forces are considered as brave mothers who sacrificed our sons and daughters, by the nationalist propaganda. We were told that this sacrifice is only sufficient for a mother to gain *nirvāṇa* (enlightenment*)* by our religious leaders at funerals. As a mother of a dead soldier and a wife of a dead soldier, I feel that while misinterpreting the concept of 'motherhood' in the name of nationalism, our political and religious leaders have misused us according to their interests. The final result was that I lost both my son and the husband [Interview number18: Sinhala Buddhist].

5) 'Why only women have to sacrifice for others': In the midst of suffering, war-widows challenged the norm that women exclusively have to make sacrifices for their true love, whereas this is seldom asked of men. In family life, sacrifices always have to be made by mothers, not by fathers. Widows have to sacrifice their happiness after the death of their husbands, but not widowers. Only women have to safeguard their good name and dignity when they become widows, but not the widowers. A widow has to sacrifice her freedom with regard to the issue of remarriage, but not a widower.

> After the death of my husband, our village monk said to me as a woman coming from a very good family, I must keep the name of my father and husband. For this, he asked me not to think of another marriage since I am a mother of a daughter. Do they say the same for men? I do not think.... They expect all sacrifices only from women [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

6) 'I do not want to be controlled by others': Being the sole decision-makers in their families, widows expressed their desire to be free to make their own decisions rather than being controlled by others.

Since in Buddhist culture sex is considered to be craving that causes suffering, widows who think of remarriage are placed within this negative social construction of sinfulness. Widows are expected to renounce sex and other pleasures and this has to be visible in their behaviour and the way they dress. Unlike the first marriage, the second marriage is considered to be a desire of the flesh, yet when it comes to men the idea is seen differently as the society considers male sexuality to be in need of constant gratification because of its virility.

> Since I am young, I need to think of another marriage which is my personal decision whatever the reasons behind it. The government also discourages remarriage of the widows of soldiers by discontinuing all the pensions and allowances we get as war-widows.. [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

On the one hand, some widows questioned the oppressive teachings on suffering in the midst of their unjust suffering, especially in their roles as mothers, wives, and citizens of the country that treats them as secondary to men. On the other hand, while dealing with their suffering in a new way, they provided some insights for rethinking the validity of some

of the oppressive teachings on suffering in their religious thinking. As Karma Lekshe Tsomo asked, "how can a tradition dedicated to relieving suffering ignore the suffering of women?"[116] The main concern of war-widows was to resist the oppression in patriarchal hegemonies. For Gross, an androgynous model, two-sexed or bisexual model of humanity is the suggestion to overcome women's suffering, instead of the androcentric model or one-sexed model of humanity. Gross emphasises that despite gender and sexual differences, both sexes – male and female – are equally human.

The challenge put forward by the three Buddhist feminist thinkers and the Buddhist war-widows is to overcome the suffering of women in Buddhist patriarchal structures. The fieldwork revealed that while rejecting the oppression of the patriarchal system, war-widows were longing for an alternative society where they could live with dignity. The new desire of war-widows is a challenge to the existing oppressive patriarchal teachings, myths and customs in Buddhist society, culture and Buddhist religious institutions. It is important to re-think whether the Buddhist societies and Buddhist institutions are ready to re-evaluate and unlearn the oppressive teachings and customs in Buddhist society and to stop discrimination of women and to affirm the dignity of women.

2.2 Rejecting the Myth 'Female rebirth is inferior to men'

'We are born women due to our bad *kamma*', 'since we are women, we have to suffer in this life', 'women deserve suffering', 'women suffer due to their bad *kamma*', and 'suffering is a part of women's lives', these are some of the phrases that often echo among the Buddhist women in SL. The findings of the fieldwork suggest that a considerable number of Buddhist war-widows are confused about the teachings and existing ideas regarding the notion that women deserve to suffer due to their 'inferior' birth as women. Female rebirth and bad *kamma* are major themes that emerged in the fieldwork. Is it correct to consider the suffering of women as the result of their unavoidable bad *kamma*?

116 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Liberating All Beings from Suffering, Women Included,": https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/liberating-all-beings-suffering-women-included (accessed 20 October 2016).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the perception of women as inferior to men is a common factor in Asian Buddhist societies. According to David R. Loy, the Buddhist explanation for it is: "those unfortunate enough to be born as women are reaping the fruits of their bad karma."[117] Diana Paul states that what is feminine, is *saṃsāra*: the world of bondage and desire that leads to cycles of rebirth.[118] In Peter Harvey's view, in Theravāda tradition, in terms of rebirth a female form is seen as less fortunate than a male one. It tends to involve more forms of suffering including menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and the subordinate position of women in many societies.[119]

According to Dale S. Wright, in Asian cultures, "the karma is the primary concept governing the moral sphere of culture … karma is the teaching that tells practitioners that it matters what they do throughout their lives, and how they do it."[120] The understanding of the teachings of the law of *kamma* has a negative impact on the lives of women as they view misfortunes as the ripening of the unwholesome actions of the past life. The women think that they are unable to change these misfortunes in their lives because the theory of *kamma* encourages them to accept them passively. As Jetsun Kushok Chimey Luding claims, there are moments when life became so difficult that women prayed not to be reborn as women but as men.[121]

Exploring the origins of the doctrine that excludes women from the *bodhisatva* path, Appleton states that it denies women's ability to lead the Buddhist community, as well as their ability to pursue the highest spiritual

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117 David R. Loy, "The Karma of Women": http://www.jonathantan.org/handouts/buddhism/Loy-Karma_of_Women.pdf (accessed 20 September 2016).

118 Cf. Diana Paul, *Women in Buddhism*, 3-4.

119 Cf. Peter Harvey, "Buddhist Visions of the Human Predicament and Its Resolution," in *Buddhism*, ed. Peter Harvey (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 70-71.

120 Dale S. Wright, "Critical Questions towards a Naturalized Concept of Karma in Buddhism," *Journal Buddhist Ethics* (Los Angeles: Department of Religious Studies), 79:http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/files/2010/04/wright04.pdf (accessed 13 October 2016).

121 Jetsun Kushok Chimey Luding, "Women: A Buddhist View – An Interview with Jestun Chimey": http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Women:_a_Buddhist_View%E2%80%94An_Interview_with_Jetsun_Chimey (accessed 25 October 2016).

goal, consequently, "this sends a broader message to women about their spiritual capabilities, and suggests that birth as a female is significantly worse than as a male, and must therefore be the result of bad karma. Furthermore, it suggests that an appropriate aim for a Buddhist woman is to aspire to be reborn male."[122] Therefore, says Appleton, "despite the secondary position of the *bodhisatva* path in Theravāda Buddhism, the exclusion of women from it has had a serious impact on the aspirations of Buddhist women in South and Southeast Asia through to the present day."[123]

Bhikkhu Analayo states that although there is evidence for a more negative attitude towards women in commentarial literature, yet in narrative Buddhist literature female birth was not seen as something negative.[124] For example, *bhikkhuṇī* Khema challenged her whole sex by proving that the sex of a person is not a barrier to attain *arhanthship* as she considered that women's nature did not prevent them from the ultimate goal. In the case of *bhikkhuṇī* Khema, a woman was able to gain *nirvāṇa* while being in the world.[125]

2.2.1 Reviewing the Myth of Female Birth as the Result of Bad *Kamma*

According to Buddhism, as discussed in chapter four, there are three factors which are necessary for the rebirth of a human being: (1) The female ovum; (2) The male sperm; and (3) The *kamma* energy, which is sent forth by a dying individual at the moment of his/her death.[126] The *kamma* is *not* the only fact for the rebirth, yet it is one of the major factors. The same chapter described *kamma* and rebirth, the two aspects of life, inseparably connected in Buddhism, as different from the pre-Buddhist view of *kamma* because in Buddhism *kamma* is not viewed as reward and punishment. Yet, one of the most popular Buddhist attitudes to sex is that female rebirth is an unfortunate existence. Consequently, women deserve

122 Naomi Appleton, "In the Footsteps of the Buddha?: Women and the Bodhisatta Path in Theravada Buddhism," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 27, no.1 (Spring, 2011): 33.

123 Ibid., 35.

124 Cf. Analayo, "Karma and Female Rebirth," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 21, (2014): 142.

125 Cf. *Therigatha* 1, iii.

126 Cf. Nyanatiloka, *Karma and Rebirth* (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1964), 2.

suffering. As Rita Gross claims, Buddhist society considers unfortunate happenings as natural and irreversible – being reborn as a woman is the result of bad *kamma* in the past.[127]

The Buddhist war-widows mentioned how they were presented with a complicated set of teachings, thoughts and ideas, which were not taught by the Buddha, to prove that women deserve suffering in their family, religion and society. They further mentioned that such traditional applications of teachings had been used against them to accept all kinds of oppression without questioning. One widow said:

> After listening to all the suffering that I faced due to my widowhood, one monk said, since I am a woman, I should learn to accept them with patience. He said that I had been born a woman as a result of my bad *kamma*, so that I needed to bear all kinds of suffering [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

The widows shared that the deaths of their husbands were seen as the reason of the bad *kamma* of war-widows and accordingly they were blamed for the death of their husbands by the whole society.

> The most difficult fact is that my parents-in-law and his family members blame me for the death of my husband. They are telling me that he died because of my bad *kamma*. Why do they not think that it is not my fault, but the fault of the brutal war that lasted for many years? [Interview number 16 - Sinhala Buddhist].

The traditional explanation of the difficult positions of women in the present situation – due to the bad *kamma* of the previous life – affirms that women 'deserve' what they get due to which women are told that they reap what they have sown and that there is no basis for complaint. Gross, rejecting the notion that female birth is unfortunate, says that classical Buddhism, rather than seeking to change one's present oppressive condition, emphasises that one should serve well in one's allotted role, knowing that such good acts produce merit leading to a more fortunate rebirth in the future, a male rebirth.[128] In the view of Gross, it is essential to understand that the traditional way of analysis is only an *explanation,* but

127 Cf. Rita Mary Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation* (London, New York: Continuum, 2001), 175.

128 Rita Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 64.

not a *justification.* The law of *kamma* is about cause and effect, it is not a theory of reward and punishment, *kamma* is not a theory of predestination, says Gross.[129]

The three engaged Buddhist thinkers – Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa and Bernie Glassman – hold the view that present suffering cannot be limited to the bad *kamma* of the person in light of the structural violence in society. Nevertheless, they do not highlight the suffering of women in Buddhist societies due to the myth of female rebirth as the result of bad *kamma*. Unlike the engaged Buddhist thinkers, the analysis of the feminist thinkers is rooted within the specific experiences of women who are marginalised and blamed for their suffering. Speaking about the oppressive situation of women in Thai society, where the oppression of women has been justified on the basis of *kamma*, Dhammanandā indicates that the position and problems of women in that society also have their main root in the Buddhist 'institution'.[130] In her view, "the belief that one's gender is the result of 'bad karma' does not hold any meaning."[131] Gross insists on the need to move beyond the common terminologies used in relation to suffering, such as acceptance, non-aggression and forbearance, while sorting out the things that can be changed and actively working to change them, rather than passively accepting them as 'just my *kamma*'.[132]

The Buddha did not consider women as being inferior to men, instead he recognised the importance of collaboration of both feminine and masculine aspects of human nature. Even many Buddhists who followed Buddha's teaching held the attitude that rebirth of a woman is inferior to that of a man. Buddha had not discussed the reason why a person is born a male or female. The Buddha said:

> What matters being a woman
> If with mind firms set
> One grows in the knowledge
> Of the right Law, with insight?[133]

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129 Cf. Ibid., 142.

130 Cf. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Thai Women in Buddhism*, 16.

131 Ibid., 31.

132 Cf. Rita Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 146.

133 *SN*; V: 2.

The Buddhist war-widows with their new ways of understanding suffering, challenged the existing myths in their communities on female birth, as it has led to male domination over women by creating suffering in the lives of women. They did not consider that they were inferior to men as they were aware of the dignity of both women and men.

"I do not believe that we women are inferior to men" [Interview number 17: Sinhala Buddhist].

"The Buddha did not say that the rebirth of male is higher than the rebirth of female. All these ideas are later on adopted by anti-women leaders of our religion" [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

"The dangerous aspect of this myth of rebirth is that men thinking that their status is higher than women control us, which is against the teachings of the Buddha" [Interview number 13: Sinhala Buddhist].

"Monks cannot justify our suffering saying that women deserve suffering" [Interview number 15: Sinhala Buddhist].

The responses of the war-widows did not only challenge the existing teachings and customs of the Buddhist institution and society, but they also challenge both men and women, who inherited the idea that female rebirth is inferior to male rebirth, including the many women who strive to be born as men in the next life. Giving alms to monks is very common and fulfilling for Buddhist women, but as Karma Lekshe Tsomo claims, "consigning women to the role of donor rather than beneficiary of the merit system has created unbalanced societies."[134] Despite the fact of marginalisation in society, war-widows mentioned that the most important need is finding ways to change the social system that makes widows unjustly suffer, rather than wishing for rebirth as a man in the next birth.

2.2.2 Resisting the Myth of 'Inferior' Female Rebirth

The responses of Buddhist war-widows challenged the sexist misunderstanding of the nature of female rebirth. The war-widows experienced that they suffered more than men, yet the theory of rebirth

134 Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Liberating All Beings from Suffering, Women Included,": https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/liberating-all-beings-suffering-women-included (accessed 28 October 2016).

discouraged them from changing the social structures that oppress them. The justification of gender hierarchy through the interpretation of negative *kamma* and female birth was repudiated by the war-widows in their dealing with suffering.

1) 'Women do not deserve suffering': The Buddhist war-widows mentioned how they were presented with a complicated set of teachings and thoughts which justify the notion that women deserve suffering in their family, religion and society. They further mentioned that such traditional applications of teachings had been used against them to accept all kinds of oppressions without questioning. Some widows claimed:

> Suffering is a common aspect in all beings, yet it cannot justify the unjust suffering of women. We women were not born to suffer in this life [Interview number 13: Sinhala Buddhist].

> Men are not aware that we suffer mainly because of their oppression, instead they simply say that to be born a woman is suffering. How unfair for them to look at women in this perspective? Many are afraid to challenge the views of men [Interview number 16: Sinhala Buddhist].

2) 'Unjust suffering in my life is not a result from my bad *kamma*': While bringing to attention different aspects connected to their suffering, the war-widows explained that the cause of their suffering is not their bad *kamma*, but the existing unjust social structures. A Buddhist war-widow whose husband died while fishing, but as a result of an attack by the LTTE, had the idea that widows of the soldiers receive more respect from the society than she does.

> After the death of a soldier, people in my village made a monument with the advice of the Buddhist monk in the temple. For them he is a war hero, as he sacrificed his life for the nation and religion. People consider his wife to be lucky because she is the wife of a soldier. Since I am not the wife of a soldier my situation in the village is very different. I get nothing from the government and even people including our religious leaders do not bother about me. The situation of widows in our culture is very pathetic. If she is a wife of a soldier, the situation is better than us. My husband also died due to the attack of the LTTE [Interview number 17: Sinhala Buddhist].

In the view of wives of dead soldiers, even though they are respected by the government and villagers in terms of national propaganda, in their daily lives they are marginalised by the people in their communities. A widow of a soldier was critical of this duality:

> Our villagers celebrated the war victory on the 18th of May last year and some widows of the soldiers including me were greatly welcomed and admired for being the wives of soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the country, but the same people do not like to see us in their auspicious events. They consider us as bad omen [Interview number 16: Sinhala Buddhist].

3) 'It is unethical to consider widows as bad omen': The findings of the fieldwork suggest that Sinhala Buddhist war-widows felt that their culture which is inter-connected with Buddhism, was oppressive irrespective of different social factors. Therefore, whether the widow was from a high class or lower class, young or old, educated or uneducated, the oppression of widows was rigid. The responses of the Buddhist widows challenged this rigid understanding of widowhood.

> Our Sinhala people consider me as a bad omen. They don't like to see widows when they are about to go out for an auspicious event. I myself have lots of experiences. But I never take those cultural ideas seriously. If you get hurt by what others say, you cannot survive. Some people say, directly to me you are a *Kanawandum* (widow), an unfortunate woman[135] [Interview number 15: Sinhala Buddhist].

> When my daughter came of age my family members did not allow me to bathe my child [the ritual of bathing is a puberty right in the Sinhala culture] and do the other rituals since I am a widow. I was really upset because I am the mother of my child and I am the only one who wishes the total wellbeing of my child. However, I decided to do all the rituals to my daughter breaking all the existing customs. Thereafter, my mother-in-law did not look at me even. When we break harmful traditions we should be ready to face the repercussions too. I have the strength [Interview number 17: Sinhala Buddhist].

The responses of Buddhist war-widows designated firstly that whatever the social status they belonged to, people avoided them and they were considered a bad omen due to their widowhood. Secondly, while breaking that myth, the widows tried to live as normal women without guilty consciences, courageously facing the reactions of people as they moved beyond such harmful myths.

The Buddhist widows' reaction to these teachings or understandings was resistance, as women do not deserve suffering due to their gender. They emphasised the need to recognise the different root causes that generate

135 The term *Kanawandum* is a very harsh word in the Sinhalese language.

suffering among women in society rather than simply condemning women as people with bad *kamma*.

Gross makes the following distinction, "suffering due to present human agency, to horizontal *kamma* [war, poverty and sexism], is certainly not inevitable and unavoidable in the way that suffering due to vertical karma, or the inevitabilities of birth, aging, sickness, and death, is unavoidable."[136] No one can simply say that poor deserve to be poor by virtue of their *kamma,* says Gross. Nor could one say that women deserve to be dominated by men by virtue of their *kamma*, because in Buddhist thought *kamma* is not predestined. Gross further argues that "what causes the negativity of women's existence under patriarchy is not women's karma, but the self-centred, fixated, habitual patterns of those in power, of those who maintain the status quo."[137] In Gross's point of view, whatever the type of *kamma*, it is important to locate that *kamma* in the arena of freedom, where one can make choices. Even though one cannot change the present lot, for Gross there is a possibility of dealing with the present situation in different ways. Even though Buddhist war-widows accepted that they could not avoid the results of their bad *kamm*a, they did not want to accept all kinds of suffering that they underwent as the result of their bad *kamma*.

2.3 Affirming the Need of Overcoming Suffering within the Present World

The key teaching of Buddhism is that suffering can end and that there is a path that leads to the end of suffering, *nirvāṇa*. This was the main intention of the Buddha who showed the way out of the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Apart from this ultimate *nirvāṇa*, the freedom from suffering within the world was a major theme that emerged from the responses of the Buddhist war-widows in the midst of cultural, social and religious marginalisation and oppression.

Economic turmoil, war, conflict, nationalism, domestic violence, male domination, neo-colonialism, and dictatorial regimes are common within the Asian context. In terms of Buddhism they result from greed, hatred and delusion, the root causes of suffering. For Buddhist women,

136 Rita Mary Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*, 175.

137 Ibid., 145.

the desire for liberation is twofold: they struggle to affirm their potential for liberation in the present world and to affirm their potential to attain enlightenment, the final goal in Buddhism. Karen Derris states, "[T]he Buddha affirmed that women could attain awakening as arahants, just as men could. However, according to orthodox Theravāda tradition, women could not become Buddhas in their female bodies."[138] Hence Buddhist feminist thinkers question if liberation is a viable goal for all human beings, why there is discrimination against women?

Nevertheless, there are Buddhist women "who have broken through the stereotypes of the undemonstrative Asian women and have achieved greatness in ways that challenge our own preconceived notions and complacencies."[139]

The hope of Buddhist thinkers is that attitudes towards women can be changed through physical, mental and spiritual awareness of women all over the Buddhist world, by means of grassroots activities, conferences, writings, study programs and retreats in Buddhist communities.

2.3.1 Personal Liberation of *Saṃsāra* within the Social Liberation

Chapter four of the present thesis discussed awareness of suffering as the foundation of the basic teachings of the Buddha who revealed that there is suffering in life and that there is also a way to end suffering. The Buddha discovered the Middle Path to end suffering, the way to enlightenment. Many Buddhist war-widows have the idea that whatever happens in their lives, their fellow Buddhists, including religious leaders, consider suffering to be a part of life and no one can avoid it. In the view of widows, suffering is a common reality for all sentient beings, yet their concern is the need for liberation, while following the teachings of the Buddha who showed the Way to overcome suffering.

> The Buddha shared the Way to overcome suffering to reach the *nirvāṇa*, while recognising the causes of our suffering. By following the footsteps of the Buddha, what we must do is to try to overcome our suffering, but not to remain within it [Interview number14: Sinhala Buddhist].

138 Karen Derris, "My Sisters Future Buddhahood: A Jataka of the Buddhas Life Time as a Woman," in *Eminent Buddhist Women,* ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Albany: Suny Press, 2014), 13.

139 Karma Lekahe Tsomo, "Introduction" in *Eminent Buddhist Women*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Albany: Suny Press, 2014), 4.

While rejecting the notion that all their suffering was due to their bad *kamma*, war-widows highlighted the suffering generated within the country's unjust social, cultural and religious structures. Hence, before speaking about the ultimate *nirvāṇa*, the war-widows wanted to address the need for liberation in the present reality.

> How can I think of *nirvāṇa* when I am living with unending suffering currently. First of all I must think how to overcome suffering in this life. That is my basic need at the moment [Interview number 16: Sinhala Buddhist].

In the view of classical teachings of Buddhism, the ultimate goal is liberation: liberation from the wheel of *saṃsāra,* which emphasises personal liberation rather than the social aspect of liberation. The fourth chapter explored the three engaged Buddhist thinkers who are aware of the spiritual goal in Buddhism, focus on liberation not only from the wheel of *saṃsāra* but mainly from *dukkha* in all spheres, and the perfection of wisdom and compassion: the personal spiritual liberation along with the transformation of the oppressive social system. They understand everything in this world in terms of inter-relatedness. Accordingly, they do not consider Buddhism as something separated from society. While rejecting the dichotomy between spiritual life and social life, they see the inter-relatedness among religion, politics, economy and all the other elements in life as not isolated. They question what liberation means in today's context. This is a new paradigm of Buddhist liberation. For example, Sulak Sivaraksa's reinterpretation of the Five Precepts for the modern day provides a deeper analysis of the personal and global aspects of suffering as he creates a consciousness of social justice grounded in the teachings of the Noble Eightfold Path.[140] Sulak Sivaraksa articulates four levels of freedom: physical freedom, social freedom, emotional freedom and intellectual freedom of mind. For Sivaraksa, *nirvāṇa* should be not a metaphysical reality but a state of being. It is not a theory but an experience beyond the limits of the mundane.[141]

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140 Cf. Sulak Sivaraksa, "Integrating Head and Heart: Indigenous Alternatives to Modernity": http://www17.ocn.ne.jp/~ogigaya/tsangha/sulakdsbook.html (accessed 10 June 2015).

141 Cf. Donald K. Swearer, "Sulak Sivaraksa's Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society," in *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*, eds. Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 222.

The philosophical analysis of the three Buddhist feminist thinkers – Dhammanandā, Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Rita Mary Gross – also affirms the need of seeing, naming and addressing the social, religious and cultural violence that generates suffering. In Karma Lekshe Tsomo's point of view, the root causes of suffering that the Buddha identified should not be applied only on an individual level, but it is also important to address the structural causes of suffering on social and political levels.[142] The social analysis of the engaged Buddhist thinkers does not sufficiently include the oppression of women, especially the oppression of women in Buddhist societies due to male domination. The three feminist thinkers, addressing the oppression of women in institutional religion and their society, totally reject the suffering generated within unjust social structures, mainly unjust patriarchal structures that dehumanise women because of their sex. Gross does not deny vertical *kamma*, but she suggests that vertical *kamma* alone is not sufficient to understand the present suffering in oppressive social systems.[143] In her view, rather than individuals, the system as a whole causes suffering. If only vertical *kamma* is emphasised, questioning the present situation of injustice in society would be ignored or misinterpreted, says Gross.[144]

Similar to the experience of war-widows, the three feminist thinkers accept that there is suffering within all sentient beings, characterised by avoidable and unavoidable suffering. For them, the unjust suffering is avoidable as it cannot be justified by any Buddhist teaching. This is the main reason for Karma Lekshe Tsomo to claim that the structural violence over women cannot be considered with certainty as something women deserve due to their bad *kamma*.[145]

The three Buddhist feminist thinkers emphasise that according to the teaching of the Buddha, the sexual and gender differences are irrelevant in the path to liberation. In their view, the potential of all beings for liberation

142 Cf. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Mahaprajapathi's Legacy: The Buddhist Women's Movement: An Introduction," in *Buddhist Women across Cultures: Realizations*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 1-34.

143 For vertical *kamma,* see chapter 4: 3.4.1.3.

144 Cf. Rita Mary Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet*, 174.

145 Cf. *Karma* Lekshe Tsomo, "Mahaprajapathi's Legacy: The Buddhist Women's Movement: An Introduction," 1-34.

from suffering should spur Buddhist nations and societies to address human needs and aspirations through political policy and action. The three Buddhist feminist thinkers highlight the importance of the liberation of women from their specific suffering in unjust patriarchal social structures. Dhammanandā, for example, underlines that until the roots of enslavement of women are identified, a framework for liberation is impossible. Contrary to the three male engaged Buddhist thinkers, Gross affirms the need of identifying liberation of women from their traditional roles and social constructs, wherever women are strategically oppressed.[146]

1) 'I have the ability to reach liberation': The responses of war-widows revealed that their affirmation of liberation within the world is a way to their *nirvāṇa*, the ultimate goal in Buddhism. While all widows spoke about liberation within the world, one widow challenged the Buddhist understanding of the potential of women for their liberation. She said:

> My only desire is to attain *nirvāṇa*, while overcoming suffering of *saṃsāra*. As the Buddha preached, all human beings both men and women have the potential to attain *nirvāṇa*. This is the beauty of Buddhism [Interview number 18: Sinhala Buddhist].

Almost all war-widows expressed their desire to overcome suffering generated by oppressive rules, customs and myths in their society, individually and collectively. In their awareness of structural violence within their own religion and society, they had the courage to challenge the oppressive elements, to unlearn myths they inherited from their childhood, to give up customs they found meaningless. As one widow shared:

> Since I am a woman, I was told by my elders, teachers and monks that I have to accumulate good deeds in order to become a man in my next life to attain enlightenment. I was also told that giving alms to the monks is the best way to accumulate good merits. I followed those customs, but now I do not continue them anymore. I give alms to some poor people in my village every month on the death anniversary of my husband, because they are the people who need our help [Interview number 12: Sinhala Buddhist].

Speaking of the idea that 'a woman cannot become a Buddha', Dhammanandā says that this statement has been added at least five hundred years after the Buddha's death.[147] For her, these types of ideas

146 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *A Garland of Feminist Reflections*, 69.

147 Cf. Ibid., 53.

are misinterpretations that fail to recognise women's spiritual potentials.[148] As Karma Lekshe Tsomo states, "to deny the precedent and the Buddha's legendary acknowledgment of women's equal potential to attain liberation is folly."[149]

2) 'Silence is never the answer': Living in a society, where they are silenced and controlled by patriarchal hegemony, war-widows have come to the realisation that remaining silent in the midst of male domination does not liberate them from their suffering. The responses of the Buddhist war-widows specifically indicated the need for overcoming male domination in their religion, culture and society, because it is so pervasive:

> We all women are aware that we are oppressed by men in our society and religion, yet we keep silent thinking that since we are women we cannot disobey them. I think the time has come for us to stand for what we believe and are convinced of. As we are rational beings, we should not accept all kinds of teachings in our religions without quetioning [Interview number 15: Sinhala Buddhist].

Dhammanandā points out the importance of going back to the Buddhist sources to search for buried passages, which may unravel the truth about negative beliefs with regard to women. She claims that unearthing the hidden texts can lead both men and women to overcome their negative attitudes towards women. By doing so, they will be able to bring to an end the untold suffering of the marginalised, which will help to develop the self-esteem of women. Dhammanandā does not hold on to the idea that discrimination against women in Buddhist society is the only reason for the suffering of women, but she considers it to be one of the major reasons that underpins other political, social, cultural and economic violations of women: "Buddhism cannot really blossom if half of the world's population is not given its full right to express its religious commitment."[150]

3) 'We try to understand the pain of the other': Coming from a high class and caste, the Buddha totally rejected the discrimination of people based on his/her class and caste as he understood true liberation to come through non-attachment to worldly phenomena. The war-widows revealed the importance of becoming conscious of the inter-relatedness of the

148 Cf. Ibid., 27.

149 Karma Lekahe Tsomo, "Introduction" in *Eminent Buddhist Women*, 8.

150 Ibid., 34.

whole universe, based on their awareness of the Buddhist teaching that the entire reality is deeply inter-connected: nothing exists in separation. This understanding made them sensitive to the pains and struggles of others.

The majority of the Buddhist war-widows in the research sample are wives of the soldiers of the GoSL, due to which they are economically strong and socially recognised as wives of 'national heroes'. Nevertheless, their psychological pain due to the loss of husbands and the sociological pain because of the absence of husbands made them extend their bond to other war-widows. Even though the major concerns of the Tamil war-widows in the associations and their involvement in associations differed from that of the Sinhalese – mainly because of ethnic marginalisation/ discrimination – the sensitivity towards the pain of the other widows was prevalent within the associations of the Sinhala widows.

> When we come together, we share our pains and problems. Since we all are widows, we can understand one another [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

> The pain of the other is also mine. This was the main reason for me to take the initiative to heal the pain of war-widows through meditation and to empower them to overcome suffering [Interview number 18: Sinhala Buddhist].

Glassman asserts, "[W]hen I see everything, including the social system, as myself, I take action to reduce suffering. I heal the system as healing myself, not fixing someone else who is to blame for all the problems."[151] In the view of Nhat Hanh, changing the mind is the way to transform the suffering world into a paradise. He says, "[I]n early Buddhism, we speak of Inter-dependent Co-Arising. In later Buddhism, we use the words inter-being and inter-penetration. The terminology is different, but the meaning is the same."[152] Since all are inter-being, the suffering of one cannot be separated from the other. For Nhat Hanh, the one who is ignorant of inter-being is not capable of seeing the suffering

151 Bernie Glassman, "The Buddhist Way of Being Present to Suffering": http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bernie-glassman/where-do-find-the-strengt_b_824261.html (accessed 2 July 2015).

152 Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999), 225.

of himself/herself as well as others.[153] Nevertheless, the responses of the war-widows are a challenge to the view of the three engaged Buddhist thinkers who often speak about inter-connectedness and inter-being of the whole universe, but lack awareness of women's suffering in society. As war-widows emphasised in different ways, women are also a part of the whole universe, and for that reason the non-inclusion of the experience of women within the social, political and economic analysis of the three engaged Buddhist thinkers cannot be justified.

4) 'Otherness' is not a threat': One Buddhist war-widow, who worked with the Tamils in the North and the East, was able to overcome the polarity of ethnic superiority and inferiority in SL between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. When she became conscious of the pain and the suffering of the 'other', she had broken the barriers of 'otherness' in order to overcome their suffering.

> We have an 'inter-religious' and 'inter-ethnic' group who are working to promote peace. Since I am working with people of other religions and especially with the Tamils, some extreme Buddhists think that being a wife of a Navy captain, I am doing something against my nation. They cannot understand the pain and the struggle of the Tamils [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

The same widow articulated a need to educate the younger generation to enhance their analysis of the ethno-national conflict and their understanding of the 'other' within the framework of non-duality in Buddhism. In her understanding, when people overcome their prejudices and duality, 'otherness' does not become a threat.

> Our children have the idea that Tamils are our enemies and the Tamils have the feeling that we are their enemies. We Sinhalese should accept what we did for the Tamils after independence. Our children do not know the real story behind the war. What they learn in the school is not the total truth. So, we must try to educate our children in order to learn how to respect each one despite his/her ethnicity and religion. According to Buddhism, everything is temporal, so we must not get attached to our ethnicity or religion. If not there will be another war in the future and both the Sinhalese and Tamils will have to undergo another massacre [Interview number 14: Sinhala Buddhist].

153 Cf. Nhat Hanh, *The Mindfulness Survival Kit: Five Essential Practices* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2014), 31.

Being aware that inter-religious dialogue in SL is limited amongst Tamil Hindus and Christians, and Sinhala Buddhists and Christians as ethnic groups, the aforementioned widow's personal view was that any discussion or dialogue with a view to upholding peace and reconciliation cannot be completed unless it includes both men and women of the four major religions and all ethnicities of SL. Similarly, the response of another Buddhist war-widow challenged all the Buddhists who claim that SL belongs only to them.

> I really can't understand how our Buddhist people, especially the monks are attached to some views, which claim that this country belongs only to Buddhists. Attachment is totally against Buddhism as it creates suffering. We should understand that nothing is permanent. Unless we are not ready to give up our wrong views, there cannot be peace in this country [Interview number 17: Sinhala Buddhist].

As Neil de Votta claims, "[A]lthough not all Sinhala-Buddhists are nationalists, the sentiment is sufficiently embedded so that Sinhala-Buddhist-nationalism, added to political Buddhism, has undermined Sinhala-Tamil relations and attempts at devolution of power, conflict resolution and dispassionate governance."[154] Karma Lekshe Tsomo highlights the importance of recovering the unheard, neglected or suppressed one-sided stories in traditions, in order to overcome the suffering of the oppressed. The Buddha emphasised in his Noble teachings that the aim of the Buddhist path is to see things as they are, the world seen without greed, hatred and delusion: "Right view, perceiving the world according to the *Dhamma.*"[155] As the Buddha said, "right view, is the practice of a course of action leading to the cessation of *dukkha*."[156] Right view is an essential element to end the suffering of the oppressed. This Buddhist teaching of 'right view' offers a way of looking at the ethnic conflict – the root causes, the nature of the armed conflict and post-war situation – without preconceptions.

In his non-dualistic way of thinking, Bernard Glassman does not see the 'other' as a separate being. In his view, there is no 'other',

154 Neil De Votta, *Sinhalese-Buddhist Nationalist Ideology: Implications for Politics and Conflict Resolution in Sri Lanka* (Suite: East-West Centre, 2007), 3.

155 Paul Fuller, *The Notion of Diṭṭhi in Theravada Buddhism: The Point of View* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 41.

156 Ibid., 157-158.

as he contends that the part is the whole and the whole is the part. For him oneness and diversity are therefore the same thing. He says that by accepting differences we come together as one people.[157] The challenge made by the aforementioned Buddhist widow was how to develop the right understanding of the causes that generate suffering within the minorities in the country through re-reading the mythological history of the country that was reinterpreted during the post-colonial period to affirm the Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism and the unitary nation state model.

5) 'Buddhists should promote peace to end suffering': Some war-widows were caught up in the dilemma between the theory and the practice of Buddhism in SL. For some Buddhist war-widows the violent approaches of some monks were problematic because this is not conform the teachings of the Buddha who preached and practised non-violence. They felt that the non-violent way of the Buddha was misused by some of their religious and political leaders to achieve their selfish goals. In their struggle for liberation of their community they challenged the violent approaches of the fellow Buddhists.

> Violence is against Buddhism. Buddhism is based on love for the whole universe; not only to human beings but also to the whole universe. Today the monks who should teach the values of the Buddha are promoting violence. They say that this is a Buddhist country. If so, love, peace, respect, and forgiveness should be everywhere. I am really disappointed to see the situation of our country. This is not the Buddhism the Buddha expected us to practise [Interview number 13: Sinhala Buddhist].

As discussed earlier, the Buddhist teaching of 'non-violence' does not mean indifference to a problem or merely the absence of violence. Rather, it directs people to go beyond their selfish motives, especially to go beyond misapprehensions of life, such as nation, religion, race and so on. It is controversial to be a Buddhist while supporting any sort of violence even unintentional. Mahinda Deegalle, speaking about the role of the Sinhala Buddhist community in SL, recognises that Buddhist monks were elected by the political parties, and were major supporters of the Sri Lankan military efforts to end their war. For example, as Athuraliye Rathana Thera, leader of the Jathika Hela Urumaya party says, "we have

157 Cf. Bernie Glassman, *Bearing Witness: A Zen Master's Lessons in Making Peace* (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2013), 50-55.

to kill the killer to save the innocent. We can bring happiness to people by destroying the LTTE."[158] In the view of Karma Lekshe Tsomo, for Buddhists to speak of loving kindness, compassion and the liberation of all beings from suffering, without putting these lofty ideals into actual practice is hypocritical.[159] Gross finds intolerable contradictions between the Buddhist view and practice.[160]

The desire of the war-widows was to affirm the essence of the Five Precepts of Buddhism, which they recite daily since their childhood, hoping to see that the monks practised what they preached: loving, kindness, non-violence, non-attachment and non-discrimination to transform society. Nhat Hanh says that the Five Precepts are there to remind us of our aspirations and our commitments.[161] According to Nhat Hanh, these five mindfulness trainings are a way to practise the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path in daily life, as they are "ethical guidelines that reflect our own experience and insight."[162] Sivaraksa argues, "[I]f we Buddhists want to redirect our energies towards enlightenment and universal love, we should begin by spelling Buddhism with a small 'b'. Buddhism with a small 'b' means concentrating on the message of the Buddha and paying attention to myth, culture, and ceremony."[163]

'Hatred does not eradicate hatred' are words of *Dhammapada* that are familiar among the Buddhists in SL, yet as some widows claimed, reciting the words of *Dhammapada* does not create peace in the country because people are violent in their speech and actions. As Sulak Sivaraksa claims, Buddhism is a process of questioning and critiquing, critically questioning oneself, society and country, including one's own religious teachings. Some Buddhist war-widows did critique the contradiction between the teachings of the Buddha and what is practised by the Buddhists in SL.

158 Mahinda Deegalle, "Sinhala Ethno-Nationalisms and Militarization in Sri Lanka," in *Buddhism and Violence: Militarism and Buddhism in Modern Asia*, eds. Vladimir Tikhonov and Torkel Brekke (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 17.

159 Cf. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Socially Engaged Buddhist Nuns: Activism in Taiwan and North America," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 10 (2010): 480.

160 Cf. Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy*, 140.

161 Cf. Nhat Hanh, *The Mindfulness Survival Kit,* 23.

162 Ibid., 22.

163 Sulak Sivaraksa, *Seeds of Peace: A Buddhist Vision for Renewing Society*, ed. Tom Ginsburg (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993), 68.

Nhat Hanh says, "[R]econciliation does not mean to sign an agreement with duplicity and cruelty. Reconciliation opposes all forms of ambition, without taking sides."[164]

Each of the three engaged Buddhist thinkers emphasised the importance of cultivating mindfulness, as they perceived that there was a great connection between personal spiritual growth and social activism. They are like two sides of the same coin. The reflection of the three engaged Buddhist thinkers affirmed not only the suffering of the oppressed, but also the oppressor's ignorance, which is the main cause of suffering in Buddhism. The reflection of the three feminist Buddhist thinkers and the war-widows, while specifying women as the oppressed of the oppressed in their societies, highlight the need for liberation of women from their bondage. For them, economic and political justice ought to run parallel with the emancipation of women, because subordination of women cannot be considered secondary to other social issues.

3. Self-Definition of Buddhist and Christian War-Widows

The third part of chapter five will discuss how the Christian and Buddhist war-widows position themselves in the midst of dehumanisation, marginalisation and oppression. How do they define themselves? What is the self-representation of war-widows? Is there a difference between society's perception and the self-perception of the war-widows on widowhood? If that is the case, how could the self-representation of war-widows make a change in the social, political, cultural, and religious system in SL? How does the self-representation of war-widows challenge the existing Christian theology and Buddhist philosophy in SL?

Marianne Katoppo writes, "[T]he Asian woman's image of herself is fraught with dissatisfaction .... Instead of being a person in her own right, she will always be 'daughter/wife/mother' *of a man*."[165] In the case of Christian women, the negative image of women is due to the male domination in the Church, as Tissa Balasuriya insists, "[T]hey have given male chauvinism not only a patriarchal expression, but also a theological and even a quasi-divine legitimation."[166] Similarly, the negative image of

164 Nhat Hanh, *The Sun My Heart: Reflections on Mindfulness, Concentrations, and Insight* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1988), 128.

165 Marianne Katoppo, *Compassionate and Free*, 10.

166 Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1977), 52.

Buddhist women is the result of male chauvinism in Buddhist teachings, as well as interpretations of and myths regarding women. The situation of the common understanding of women in Asia gets worse if she happens to be a widow and is cast in terms of a weaker sex, polluted and inauspicious, or when her singleness is interpreted as being 'available'. Speaking about the widows in India, Sara Barrera asserts that "the estimated 40 million women widows in the country go from being called 'she' to 'it' when they lose their husbands. They become 'de-sexed' creatures."[167] In the Punjab a widow is referred to as 'randi', which means 'prostitute', due to which widows are forced to marry their husband's brother because "being owned by a man is a way to avoid being raped."[168] The widows are expected to meet the requirements of their society, religion, culture and tradition because of their stigmatised identity of widowhood, that is, to remain 'modest' and 'loyal' while maintaining their identity as widows.

Kwok Pui-lan, referring to Nantawan Lewis, suggests that self-redefinition, self-rehabilitation and self-acceptance are important steps in challenging the dominant negative messages about women and to develop an ethic of feminist liberation.[169] Similarly, Chung Hyun Kyung urges Asian women, who have become 'no-body' under oppressive hegemonies, to begin their healing process by discovering their essence as human beings with a sense of self-worth.[170]

3.1 Self-Definition: Recapturing the Freedom of Self-Expression

While the historical-cultural traditions in SL have negatively defined the identity of body, roles, capacities and dignity of war-widows and their destinies, the fieldwork found that war-widows in their ongoing struggle for self-identity and human dignity have made independent choices to be the persons they wanted to be, to act according to their expectations and to live in accordance with what their conscience dictated. Patricia Hill

167 Sara Barrera, "The Ongoing Tragedy of India's Widows": http://www.women undersiegeproject.org/blog/entry/the-ongoing-tragedy-of-indias-widows (accessed 23 October 2016).

168 Sara Barrera, "The Ongoing Tragedy of India's Widows": http://www.women undersiegeproject.org/blog/entry/the-ongoing-tragedy-of-indias-widows (accessed 23 October 2016).

169 Cf. Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 117.

170 Cf. Chung Hyun Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, 39.

Collins states, "defining and valuing one's consciousness of one's own self-defined standpoint in the face of images that foster a self-definition as the objectified 'other' is an important way of resisting the dehumanisation essential to a system of domination."[171]

The self-awareness of war-widows in their new situations as heads of families, as breadwinners, decision-makers and active participants in social movements have led them to rethink and evaluate their self-image, their roles and capacities as women, wives, mothers and widows imposed by the dominating structures. They have begun to redefine themselves as persons who are gifted with skills, who have the power to make independent choices, to take leadership roles and to work in solidarity with different groups of society rather than being a daughter, wife or mother.

The war-widows expressed themselves verbally and non-verbally, individually and collectively, directly and indirectly, and especially expressed their inner feelings through which they revealed their self-definition. For example, some widows expressed their anger of being oppressed by the dominant forces in society: "we are suffering because of the oppression of your government (Sinhala-centric government)", "we do not remain in silent forever", "we need justice", "why there is discrimination against widows," "I do not want to fulfil the expectations of others", and "I have to think of myself". These were no longer simple statements but strong self-definitions, expressive anger that fostered actions. Breaking the cultural, religious and political silence, war-widows transformed their anger into their own language as they had rediscovered their hidden power to express themselves in their own 'languages': language is a powerful tool of defining one's own image and the image of one's surroundings. They reclaim their 'silenced' voices and experiences due to which their self-representation had been lacking for centuries.

**1) 'I am a woman like you': ** When I interviewed one of the Buddhist war-widows, asking her as a 'widow' how she felt about the loss of her husband, her immediate response was, "please do not use the word 'widow'. I hate the word. I am also a woman like you" [Interview number 15: Sinhala

171 Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004), 108.

Buddhist]. The widows preferred to use the term 'female head' – female-headed families, associations – rather than the term 'widow', due to the fact that the terms used for 'widow' in both Tamil and Sinhala cultures are heavily stigmatised.

2) 'Get-out from my premise': Once an army soldier blocked my way so that I could not enter a widow's house during the fieldwork. The response of the widow to the soldier surprised me. She shouted, "this is my house … This is our land … How long are you going to suppress us … I do not like to see you people … get out from my premise" [Interview number 1: Tamil Christian]. Then she embraced me and cried loudly. There was a silence between us. Her cry and the silence experienced between us were an expression of the aversion to the militarised system in the North and the East.

3) 'Your people should know what happened to us': Some Tamil widows, knowing that I am Sinhalese, expressed anger towards the Sinhala centric government and soldiers. A widow said, "my daughter was raped while we were in the refugee camp, my two sons were abducted by unknown people because they were in the LTTE and I still do not know what happened to them. See, I even do not have a proper place to live. We are suffering because of your people, yet we are not defeated. We still have hope" [Interview number 3: Tamil Christian war-widow].

Self-definition is essential for survival. It helps not only the war-widows but also other people in their community to reject the internalised psychological oppression, and the myth that cultural, religious and social norms, rules and teachings are irreversible. They demystify the stereotypes by defining themselves. Once they became conscious of themselves, they realised the struggles of the other and this awareness built bridges among members in the community. The journey towards self-definition also has a political significance, as it becomes an act of resistance that has relevance for both individuals and the whole community. The empowerment of the self carries a great potential not only to overcome personal victimhood but also structural oppression.

Rejecting 'virtues', such as self-sacrificial love and selfless love in the patriarchal system, the widows had begun to appreciate self-love, self-respect as essential virtues and to value the dignity of womanhood. It enhanced their ability to create new relationships with themselves and

with the community. This understanding illustrates the transformation of reality through resistance and an alternative to the endurance of passivity: it is a process of de-formation, re-formation and trans-formation of the identity of war-widows.

3.2 Self-Definition: Validating the Power of War-Widows as Human Subjects

While the war widows took over the power of the dominant forces that controlled them, they began to speak on behalf of themselves and to take decisions on their own. Their self-definition helped them to journey from victimisation to becoming agents of transformation. For war-widows, understanding or expressing the self was not the goal but rather the point of departure in the process of transforming oppressive elements in their life.

Discussion with the Christian and Buddhist war-widows about their suffering/marginalisation, presented new insights and challenges to the existing theologies and philosophies in SL. Their response was a challenge, a warning, and resistance to the existing oppressive and patriarchal systems in SL.

1) Naming suffering: Firstly, the Buddhist and Christian war-widows, in the midst of utmost suffering and marginalisation, living with blame and humiliation because of their widowhood, critically reflected and evaluated their suffering, which is unprecedented in Sri Lankan society. They openly and courageously expressed and named their suffering. Patriarchal domination of all spheres in society, cultures and religions, the stigmatised situation of widowhood, the ethnic domination of Sinhala 'majority' over Tamil ethnic 'minority' and the class/caste domination are some of the main elements continually highlighted by the war-widows in relation to their experience of suffering.

2) Rejecting unjust suffering: Secondly, both Buddhist and Christian war-widows rejected all kinds of suffering. They also dismantled the notion of the patriarchal view that women deserve to suffer. While proving that they are not mere victims in oppressive systems but moral agents in society, the war-widows resist the oppressive systems of marginalisation, hoping to affirm the dignity of women and widows because they feel that a woman cannot be devalued due to widowhood. Their active roles in the 'social sphere', which was restricted for women, indicates their capacity to overcome barriers.

3) Being social and political agents: Thirdly, in their new roles as heads of families, as breadwinners, decision-makers, as active members in women's movements and the political sphere, the fieldwork revealed that both Buddhist and Christian war-widows no longer want to be victims within the oppressive framework/s defined by oppressive powers, instead, they struggle to be the persons that they are called to be. Being creative in overcoming their suffering and the suffering of the others, the war-widows have become agents who are making an effort to build a just society. They struggle for a society where they shall live with freedom and dignity, rather than waiting for the religious promise of freedom after death.

The fieldwork indicated that, due to ethnic marginalisation, the situation of many Tamil war-widows was more oppressive than that of the Sinhalese. Some Tamil widows, in the midst of unending suffering, name their present suffering as the continuation of genocide which has been taking place since independence via Sinhalisation of the Tamil areas, militarisation, land grabbing, state brutality, oppression of Tamils and Buddhistisation. They assert their identity, seek equal rights and justice and deploy different means of resistance to emphasise that they are citizens willing to fight for freedom and self-determination.

4) Challenging religion for transformation: Fourthly, what the responses of the war-widows, who worked in the inter-religious and inter-ethnic field, suggested was that Buddhism and Christianity in SL enter into a meaningful dialogue without taking sides, while crossing the ethnic barriers that separated them for centuries, in order to work for a political solution where all ethnic communities can live with dignity and freedom. The war-widows put forward criteria for truth as not being defined by majoritarian decision. Hence, for true liberation in SL, both religions need to distance themselves from their prejudices, historical myths, selfish motivations, and one-sided stories about their religion, history and views of women. As the responses of the widows indicated, in the process of reconciliation, not only should the inter-religious be highlighted but also the inter-ethnic dimension, for which reason religious and secular groups of people who have different opinions should be included.

While appreciating what they gain from their own religions, most of the war-widows are critical of their religion as it hinders them in resisting their suffering. In the process of finding new ways to deal with suffering,

war-widows directly and indirectly challenge the existing teachings, rules, regulations, ideologies and customs of their own religions.

The experience of war-widows is that oppressive teachings, rules, customs and myths in Buddhism and Christianity and in culture (supported by both religions) are not irreversible because they were not ordained by God, nor resulted from bad *kamma*. They could unlearn and reinterpret in order to liberate both oppressor and oppressed, men and women, majority and the minority, because they made clear that the aim of religion should be to search for a liberative paradigm for all, without discrimination. As A. Pieris states, the challenge before religions is the way out of erroneous interpretations of religion that justify the oppression and marginalisation of particular groups of people based on gender, race and class. While speaking about interpretation of religion, A. Pieris makes the following essential point:

> It is necessary because, otherwise, a religion cannot become accessible to each successive generation. A religion has to be continually interpreted according to the aspirations, needs, challenges of each epoch. But the danger is that the interpretation may remain the only level of religion that is available to that generation, whereas, the real function of an interpretation is to lead each generation towards the collective memory and, through the memory, to the first primordial experience of experience of liberation. Furthermore, if those who are involved in the task of interpretation are themselves not making an effort to have the first primordial experience, then, their interpretation is going to be counterproductive.[172]

The widows emphasised that both Buddhism and Christianity need to envisage a liberative paradigm for the transformation of the country despite religion, ethnicity, gender, class and other social status. The major challenge put forward is that both Buddhism and Christianity need to be reinterpreted in order to accommodate the voices of the marginalised and oppressed, including the voice of women, especially war-widows. For this, 'Sinhala-Buddhism' has to be detached from its attachments to the unitary nation-state model, which creates suffering as it has created the conflict between the majority and minority ethnicities and a destructive ethnic war between GoSL and the LTTE, which made thousands of women widows.

172 Aloysius Pieris, *Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity: Doing Inter-Reliigous Studies in the Reverential Mode* (Colombo: Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 2005), 109.

The challenge for Christians today is to think, speak and act through the language of liberation rather than being aligned with the dominant and dominative forces.

As A. Pieris says, "[O]nly the oppressed know and speak the language of liberation, the language of the spirit, the language of true religion."[173] Ursula King, emphasising the experience of oppressed women contends that "the critical examination of theological premises uncovers the hidden structures, and especially the sexist assumptions … as well as the positive construction of a new theology which draws feminine symbols and experiences in scripture and tradition and wishes to give women's experience and participation full expression …"[174] The major challenge is, how far have women's experiences been taken into account in the theological/philosophical articulations and reflections of Buddhism and Christianity in the context of SL? In how far can traditional Buddhist and Christian teachings and theologies and the reflections of liberation theologians/engaged thinkers still speak or make sense to women today? Do the Christian Churches and the existing theologies in SL sufficiently take notice of and realise that the reactions and responses of war-widows represent a major concern put forward by the war-widows? Do the existing theologies in SL consider war-widows to be a subject in theological reflection?

4. War-Widows as Icons

The word 'icon' is fundamentally associated with the Orthodox Churches and Catholic Churches of the Middle East. The Orthodox Christians call icons, 'Holy Icons', because they consider icons a sacrament through which they encounter God. The word 'icon' is derived from the Greek word *eikon* or *eikonion*, which translates literally as 'image'. The 'icon' is a theology written in images with the potential to transform the state of persons and cosmos. In the same way, war-widows, who are dealing with their suffering in a new way, have the potential to transform their oppressive social structures into a democratic society where each one

173 Aloysius Pieris, "Faith Communities and Communal Violence: The Role of Religion and Ideology," *Dialogue*, vol. 24 (Colombo: The Ecumenical Institute for Study and Dialogue, 2002): 129.

174 Ursula King, "Goddess, Witches, Androgyny and Beyond? Feminism and the Transformation of Religious Consciousness," in *Women in the World's Religions: Past and Present*, ed. Ursula King (New York: Paragon House, 1987), 203-204.

is respected and recognised as a person. As Boris Bobrinskoy states, 'icon is a sacrament', therefore, war-widows, who are struggling for liberation can be seen as 'Icons'. They have become a sacrament of the presence of the divine within society, their experiences become a powerful source of theologising in the present context of SL.[175]

A. Pieris has defined an Asian liberation theology as the interpretation of 'The Word' in the context of both the evangelical and economic poverty (the former liberating and the latter enslaving) as well as in the context of both the redemptive core and the oppressive crust of Asia's religiousness. For him, a theology is not a rational explanation of our faith but something emerging within a context of people: a dynamic involvement of a faith community.

> Theology is not 'faith seeking understanding' (*fides quaerens intellectum*) but 'faith promoting justice' (*fides promovens justitiam*). The rational approach is not denied but is made to subserve 'the holding together of the service of faith and the promotion of justice' ... Theology is not a mere rational explanation of our faith but a dynamic involvement of the minds and hearts of a faith-community in the transformation of this present existence into God's Reign of love and justice.[176]

This theological reading of the context of SL, with the yearning for liberation, takes the two major factors defined by A. Pieris – poverty and religiousness in Asia – into consideration, The Sri Lankan context can be further understood through three concepts triggered by the experience of war-widows who are the poorest of the poor: (1) Poverty; (2) Religiousness; and (3) Struggle of women against patriarchal domination – Resistance.

War-widows who are 'icons', have the potential to transform the present context, these 'icons' are at this juncture a 'locus' for determining the focus of liberation theology in SL. Their struggle for life has to be a new and a challenging model for theological reflection in liberation theology in SL. The war-widows are the theological subjects or the required source for an authoritative theological transformation of speaking on the divine.

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175 Cf. Boris Bobrinskoy, "The Icon: Sacrament of the Kingdom," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1987: http://www.apostoliki-diakonia.gr/en_main/catehism/theologia_zoi/themata.asp?cat=leit&NF=1&contents=contents.asp&main=texts&file=6.htm (accessed 10 June 2016).

176 Aloysius Pieris, *The Genesis of an Asian Theology of Liberation*, 21-22.

When lived praxis becomes the axis for theologising, the lived experiences of the war-widows cannot be excluded. The struggle of the war-widows to resist oppressive structures opens new avenues for reconstructing the existing theologies in SL. The 'poorest of the poor' experience is an influential and essential source of deconstructing "the theologies that have long been sustained by a conception of men's power over women."[177] As Kwok Pui-lan asserts, "for many Asian feminist theologians, theology is not simply an intellectual discipline or a rational reflection of Christian faith. Theologians cannot afford to engage in the academic exercise of mental gymnastics, when so many people are daily dehumanized … Theology must be embodied; and reflection and action must be integrally linked together."[178]

Critical reflection based on experience makes a strong claim that truth cannot be monopolised homogeneously, particularly in the case of theology. Evolution of theology based on the historical praxis 'lived' through by a group or a community – a historical struggle – asserts the power of 'naming', thus affecting both the method and the content of current theology, opening a window for transformation of patriarchal and other oppressive structures in society.

Apolitically construed theology, given the context of war-widows after the war and their power of resistance in SL, would not contribute to a contextualised theology as war-widows form a society that deconstructs the traditional patriarchally constituted societal structures. Theologising in light of the war-widows 'poorest of the poor' experience demands political inclusivity, because as stated in the beginning, socially constructed 'personal' experience is political.

5. War-Widows: An Alternative Magisterium for Christian Theology in SL

The two main theological sources of reflection of traditional theology are Scripture and tradition that are challenged by many progressive theologians due to their immutability, their sense of being 'official' and even because they are presented as the sole authorities.

177 Yury Puello Orozco, "I am Very Happy Despite Everything, Thanks God!: On Women with HIV/AIDS," in *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, eds. Aquino María Pilarand, Rosado-Nunes, Maria Jose (New York, Orbis Books, 2007), 211.

178 Kwok Pui-Lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology*, 32.

Schüssler Fiorenza defines '*ekklēsia* of wo/men' as a democratic congress of full decision-making citizens, while highlighting democratic equality, citizenship, and decision-making power as essential elements of the notion of *ekklēsia*.[179] The vision of the *ekklēsia* of wo/men is to struggle for change and liberation of God's life-giving and transforming power of the community, in the midst of the structural sin of the *kyriarchal* powers of exploitation and dehumanisation. Schüssler Fiorenza proposes an alternative magisterium of *ekklēsia* of wo/men as the locus or place of divine revelation besides the Bible or the tradition of the patriarchal Church. It would become a norm for Christian theology in which the preferential option for the poor becomes a preferential option for wo/men, especially poor wo/men. She speaks further about the same notion of *ekklēsia* of wo/men as a discipleship of equals, while reinterpreting the experience of the early Christian community who lived in solidarity 'from below'. Within the discipleship of equals all are learners and there are no masters; each one learns from the other, which is the new paradigm of the alternative magisterium, the *ekklēsia* of wo/men, and the norm for Christian theology.

Notwithstanding the two official magisterial – academic magisterium of the theologians and the pastoral magisterium of the bishops – A. Pieris defines a new Asian paradigm that acknowledges the third magisterium of the poor. The prophetic basic 'human communities', which are struggling with the poor for the liberation of the poor, is his new affirmation of the third magisterium, which is a critical and at the same time hopeful response to the existing theologies in the world.[180] For Pieris, they are a 'readable word of revelation',[181] which the academic magisterium of the theologians and the pastoral magisterium of the bishops do not sufficiently address in the context of Asia that is overwhelming in economic poverty and religious diversity.[182] For A. Pieris, the poor are the principal addressees of the Word and a continuation of biblical revelation.

Interpretation of 'poor' may accommodate 'poor women', but it does not specify the women who are the 'poorest of the poor' and who have become the 'other' due to oppressive constructs and who suffer triple

179 Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways*, 209.

180 Cf. Aloysius Pieris, *Fire and Water,* 156.

181 Cf. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 1988), 47.

182 Cf. Aloysius Pieris, *Fire and Water*, 75.

oppression. The contributions to humanity of the basic human community that struggles for liberation of the poor, including the community of women moving towards liberation, are hidden and under-represented. Women's invisibility in theology is not accidental as that was the way theology has been practised for many centuries. God constantly speaks in the context of the history of today's people, war-widows who are the poorest of the poor could thus be a new source of revelation for the Church in SL. Aligning with A. Pieris's assertion that the poor who are struggling for their liberation are a 'readable Word of revelation', the war-widows are such a readable Word in today's SL. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza asserts, "[O]nly if we break through the local mystification and religious legitimisations of patriarchal authority and power will women be able to reclaim our dignity, authority, and power as ecclesial subjects."[183]

Even though the war-widows are the poorest of the poor in the existing social, cultural and religious dimensions in SL, as discussed throughout this chapter, they have become a powerful theological subject through their challenging ways of dealing with the experience of oppression and marginalisation. Similar to the concept of Schüssler Fiorenza, war-widows are a 'democratic congress' of full decision-making citizens who struggle for the liberation of the whole society, while transforming oppressive structures in daily life. Schüssler Fiorenza insists that "simply belonging to an oppressed group does not necessarily guarantee the production of emancipatory knowledge."[184] Therefore, in the view of Schüssler Fiorenza, such experiences as struggling for justice and liberation and radical equality can be articulated as feminist norms. The war widows, who are the icon of the poorest of the poor, struggling for liberation and full humanity, became the locus from where the contextualised theology originates in SL, via praxis, thus holding authority to speak about the divine and forming a third magisterium.

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183 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Claiming Our Authority and Power," *Concilium*, eds. Johann Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx (Edinburgh: T & T Clark LTD, 1985): 50.

184 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 36.

In Conclusion

Women's invisibility in theology has been a common phenomenon in the existing theologies for many centuries. Doing theology from the perspective of women and the oppressed is inevitable when they become the locus of the theological discussion in SL. It is also obvious that the liberation of the poor cannot be achieved without women's liberation, given that they are the poorest of the poor. Taking women's experiences and reflections as the starting point for deconstructing the theologies that oppressed women for centuries, this study systematically scrutinised the new challenges emerging in Christian theologies and Buddhist philosophies in SL, through the reflection of the lived experiences of Buddhist and Christian war-widows.

Dealing with how the Buddhist and Christian war-widows spelled out their suffering and their own interpretations of suffering, casted light on the prevailing notions and teachings on suffering in Buddhist philosophical and Christian theological thinking. Compared to the theories presented in chapters three and four, 'Suffering in Christian theological thinking and in Buddhist philosophical thinking', the exploration of the responses of the war-widows led to a focus on new elements: their first-hand experiences of suffering and resistance.

The reflection of the experience of war-widows in dealing with their suffering and marginalisation paved the way to seeing theology as emerging from the experience of those who are struggling to overcome their oppression and where God is to be found anew. The stories of war-widows illustrate that they made the connection between faith and action as a basis for theology, which has the potential to contribute to the existing theologies by challenging, rediscovering and renaming the truth that has been hidden for centuries. In his understanding of doing theology in the context of Asia, A. Pieris recognises religiousness of the poor as a new source. His view is that theology has to begin within the struggle of local people for dignity. The result of this way of doing theology is, he says, that Christians and non-Christians who are the majority in Asia, together can articulate their liberation. This is why A. Pieris insists that inculturation and liberation, rightly understood, are two names for the same process.[185]

185 Cf. Aloysius Pieris, "A Theology of Liberation Theology in Asian Churches," in *Liberation in Asia: Theological Perspectives*, eds. S. Arokiasamay and G. Gispert (Delhi: Vidyajyoti, 1987), 18.

In the development of theology, other religions can be taken seriously as a way and source of liberation. The 'other' religion cannot be considered as false or inferior to Christianity.[186] In A. Pieris's observation this process is taking place gradually in the 'basic human communities' in which both Christian and non-Christian 'poor' reflect together and strive together for full humanity.[187] Similarly, the explorations of the fieldwork done with both Buddhist and Christian war-widows, belonging to both Sinhala and Tamil ethnic communities, revealed an alternative way of doing theology that takes the experience of the oppressed women who struggle for liberation as a source of liberation. The fieldwork also extended the experience of oppressed women in an inter-religious context to the inter-ethnic, while breaking the boundaries between the majority and the minority groups in the country. By doing so, war-widows have become pioneering voices of reconciliation in inter-religious and inter-ethnic spheres at grassroots level in the post-war context in SL.

In the view of A. Pieris, "each religion is a unique language, an idiom, with which the human mind in a given particular context has expressed its yearning for and its experience of integral liberation."[188] Hence, in speaking about the liberation Christology of religious pluralism, he draws attention to two imperatives: (1) Fidelity to what is unique to Christian faith; and (2) Fairness towards every other religion's distinctive otherness, because the ultimate goal of every religion is the liberation of 'every human person and the whole human person': a soteriological absolute. It is worth mentioning that in his view, what is unique to a religion is the 'defining and distinguishing character of the soteriology', which that particular religion has. Therefore, uniqueness could also mean exclusiveness, but it is not the superiority over another religion. He, furthermore, says that this uniqueness of a religion is what each religion is called to contribute to others for mutual enrichment.[189]

The truth is not the possession of any particular person or tradition, hence, theology cannot be considered to be the property of a particular group of people. Theology has to emerge, from the historical reality of the

186 Cf. Ibid., 17.

187 Cf. Ibid., 37-38.

188 Aloysius Pieris, *Prophetic Humour in Buddhism and Christianity,* 106.

189 Cf. Aloysius Pieris, *The Genesis of an Asian Theology of Liberation*, 168-171.

people in a context. By claiming the power of naming, war-widows are in the process of reforming male stream theologies. Hopefully this process of producing a new way of doing theology, seeks to correct and complete the one-dimensional tunnel vision of society and of the organised religion of the country. It generates a new way of thinking about faith, starting from practical reality. The war-widows' contribution affects both the method and the content of current theology and opens the way for new explorations, as it demands the transformation of *kyriarchal* structures in society. The war-widows are the principal addressees of the Word and are a continuation of biblical revelation. They mediate God's presence to all and God is seen as continuing to speak in the context of the history of today's people through war-widows, whose language is critical, contextual, constructive and creative.

The war-widows redirected the power of the dominant forces that controlled them: they began to speak, to take decisions of their own. It is a journey from victimhood to agency and transformation, where they become conscious of their potential and the dignity of womanhood, breaking the boundaries of 'established identity of womanhood/widowhood' amid SL's present yearning for reconciliation and lasting peace.

APPENDIX

The questionnaire/in-depth interview guide that I used in the interviews

1. Could you please tell me how did you become a widow?
2. What was your first reaction when you became a widow?
3. What kind of feelings did you experience when you became a widow?
4. What were the challenges that you perceived ahead of you?
5. What were the hindrances that you faced in your family, people around you, religion and culture?
6. What are the changes that you have to face as a widow?
7. What is your experience of being a widow in your family, environment and religion?
8. How do you deal with changes that you have to face in life?
9. Where are you involved in?
10. What kind of support do you get from the people in general and in particular the people you are involved in?
11. How does your religion affect the way you face life?
12. What is/are your personal view/s about God/s?

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SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

BREAKING THE BARRIERS

A REFLECTION ON SUFFERING IN BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE PERSPECTIVES OF WAR-WIDOWS IN SRI LANKA

Being a Sri Lankan woman, living in a country that is in transition, a country recovering from the brutal war between the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelaam (LTTE), the vulnerability of the people struggling for their self-determination and freedom struck me, in particular the war-widows. Among the people affected by the war these women constitute a marginalised group within the present-day oppressive socio-political and religio-cultural structures. The war-widows have to overcome many obstacles that they encounter on their paths, which is often a crossing of barriers that is dangerous and amounts to a 'death experience'. Yet the women continue their struggle for full humanity through resistance as a new way of dealing with their marginalisation.

Living in the midst of war-widows who constantly inspire me through their struggle for liberation impelled me to raise such questions as: what insights do they generate in my theological reflection as a woman? How do religions support them to overcome their suffering or do religions make these women victims through the religious customs, rituals and teachings? Is there any connection between the perception of widows in society and the teachings of religions in Sri Lanka (SL)? How does the reflection on the experiences of the women who put up resistance to their suffering challenge the existing theologies in SL? Do the existing theologies in SL become a premise for these women to promote their dignity and freedom as women within the Sri Lankan society that is patriarchal and hence discriminates against women because of their gender, and also their ethnicity, class and social status?

With all these questions in mind and focusing on both Buddhist war-widows who are in the majority and Christian war-widows who belong to the Sinhala and Tamil communities, I began to investigate the ways in which they were dealing with their marginalisation. I started with the research question: how do the Buddhist and Christian war-widows of Tamil and Sinhala ethnicities perceive and deal with their marginalisation,

oppression and suffering in relation to Buddhist and Christian notions regarding suffering?

In the search for answers to this question, this study explores the contextual and theological relevance of the reflection on the struggle of Buddhist and Christian war-widows to develop a theology that deals with their resistance to the marginalisation and oppression in the post-war context in SL. This research also seeks to discover how such a theology could reshape and reconstruct the existing theologies in SL through the theological challenges and new explorations resulting from the struggle, resistance and self-definition of war-widows.

As a theology emerges from a particular socio-political and religio-cultural context, this thesis therefore begins with a chapter outlining the SL context from which the theological exploration starts. Because the main focus of this thesis regards women who became widows due to the ethnic war between the GoSL and the LTTE, the first chapter demonstrates that the situation of the war-widows is not an isolated phenomenon because of its connection with the socio-political and religio-cultural system in the country. Hence, this chapter analyses, (1) the background of the situation of the widows, that is, the social, religious, political and economic context of SL; (2) the root causes of the ethno-national war, which lasted for three decades, making many women widows; and (3) the cultural and religious factors that contributed to the continual marginalisation of war-widows. The study thus establishes that the reality of war-widows is an outcome of social, religious, cultural, economic and political factors that prevailed in the country for many centuries, a framework within which the marginalisation of the country's widows must be analysed.

After discussing the socio-political and religio-cultural context, and the influence of both Sinhala and Tamil cultures on the lives of widows, the findings of my fieldwork are analysed. This was carried out within a group of Sinhala and Tamil war-widows with the intention of studying the resistance of war-widows to the existing marginalisation in the present post-war context. The fieldwork explores a significant yet unknown area of the experiences and the reality of being a war-widow. Despite restrictions and shortcomings, the fieldwork was organised in a way that was to lead to an understanding of five main areas that deeply concern the lives of war-widows: (1) factors that made women war-widows and their first

reaction to being forced into widowhood; (2) challenges the war-widows faced after the death of their husbands; (3) obstacles war-widows faced in society; (4) their participation and involvement in support groups in society; and (5) war-widows' views on religion and God/s. The fieldwork investigates in detail not only the visible status of war-widows in SL, but also the differences between the experiences of a Sinhala war-widow and a Tamil war-widow in the same Sri Lankan society, as well as the resistance of war-widows to the prevailing religious, cultural, economic and political hegemonies.

The war-widows' responses and reactions reveal their capacity to challenge the prevailing ideologies of the social structures that marginalise them. The new ways in which they deal with their marginalisation provide new ideas, hypotheses, and principles that should be taken into consideration in the existing religious, cultural, economic and political spheres. They pave the way to 'birthing' new ideologies, even theologies that are intrinsically linked with a context of understanding widows, and also their role in and contribution to society.

Since the war-widows in their search for liberation question some of the existing teachings, ideas and explanations on suffering in their religious thinking, a reflection on suffering in Christian theological and Buddhist philosophical thinking – which I selected as the religions of the war-widows for the fieldwork – is presented and discussed in the chapters three and four. These two chapters examine whether religion functions as a supportive element to overcome the marginalisation and oppression of the widows, or rather as a means that is misused to marginalise widows through oppressive teachings, customs and rules. The discussion on suffering is three-fold and consists of: (1) a description of the Teaching Authority of the Roman Catholic Church and Theravāda Buddhism; (2) a critical analysis of the experience of suffering from the perspective of Catholic liberation theologians, a Protestant theologian and engaged Buddhist thinkers; and (3) a more critical analysis of the experience of suffering from the perspective of feminist theologians and feminist Buddhist thinkers.

The third chapter discusses suffering in Christian theological thinking, with an emphasis on a theological and contextual exploration of Christian war-widows' resistance to their marginalisation on three main levels. The first part of this chapter explores the six main areas that make

up the traditional teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on suffering, in which (1) original sin and individual sin are emphasised and suffering is considered to be a mystery; (2) suffering is regarded as redemptive; (3) there is no salvation without suffering; (4) suffering is glorified; (5) the suffering of Jesus is accentuated as the salvific plan of God; and (6) taking up one's cross to follow Jesus is encouraged. Pre-eminent is the goal of suffering: the glorification of God through suffering. However, different Christians have problematised these teachings, precisely because they have been used to justify, dehumanise and marginalise many people in different societies.

In the second part, the difference between theological abstractionism and praxis-oriented theology is underlined within the reflection of two liberation theologians – Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino – and the Protestant theologian, Jürgen Moltmann. They argue that the traditional teachings of the Church on suffering is parochial and needs to be revitalised in order to speak of God responsibly and in relation to the struggles of people. These theologians emphasise those weaknesses of the teachings of the Church on suffering that justify suffering as redemptive. Instead, they highlight social sinfulness – unjust social structures – rather than the individual sinfulness of people. Therefore, instead of limiting their theology of liberation to meta-cosmic realities, they foreground the liberation of the socio-political reality of the present world.

Even though the two liberation theologians and the Protestant theologian challenge many abstract teachings of the Church, they bring in the notion that suffering is inevitable in the efforts to bring about a just society. Hence, the third part of the chapter explores how three feminist theologians – Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock and Nancy Pineda-Madrid – analyse suffering from the perspective of the oppressed (including the poor), especially from the perspective of 'poor' women as they are the most vulnerable group of people in many societies and religions. The most important aspect of their theology is that they do not consider women to be victims, but rather as the ones who challenge and resist oppressive social, cultural, religious and political structures. Being rooted in different social contexts of oppression and violence, the three feminist theologians argue that suffering is not an isolated reality. They point out that the existing social and religious structures justify suffering and encourage women to

embrace it as natural. They reject the notion of justifying or glorifying suffering, for any reason whatsoever. Neither do they romanticise the poor as do the two liberation theologians in their theology. The third part of this chapter further reveals that feminist theologians, unlike the two liberation theologians and the Protestant theologian, connect suffering with hope: hope to overcome suffering through the struggles of women.

In Chapter four, the discussion proceeds to the study of suffering as understood and presented in Buddhist philosophical thinking, the foundation of the basic teachings in Buddhism. The first part of the chapter deals with the teachings of Theravāda Buddhism, mainly focusing on the reality of suffering in relation to the teachings of suffering (*dukkha*), impermanence (*anicca*) and 'no eternal soul' (*anattā*). Central to these teachings are the Four Noble Truths, which acknowledge that there is suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of *dukkha* and the Eight Noble Path as the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.

The second part of the chapter studies the teachings of the Buddha so as to determine its validity not only for a personal liberation, but also for the liberation of all the people from the suffering generated within unjust social structures. Three engaged Buddhist thinkers – Thich Nhat Hanh, Sulak Sivaraksa and Bernie Glassman – challenge the teachings that place personal *nirvāṇa* at the centre of its dogma while neglecting the suffering of the society. In their social analysis of suffering, they identify different root causes that generate suffering in society. They also highlight the importance of engaging with this collective suffering and the importance of the liberation of all those who suffer – an engagement that could help to reach the ultimate goal of being a Buddhist, that is, *nirvāṇa.*

The engaged Buddhist thinkers do not perceive the oppression of women in society and religion to be a major issue like other social, political and economic issues as underlined by the three Buddhist feminist thinkers. Hence, the third part of the chapter discusses that and why the three feminist Buddhist thinkers, *bhikkhuṇī* Dhammanandā, *bhikkhuṇī* Karma Lekshe Tsomo and Rita Mary Gross firmly deny the justification of gender imbalance in Buddhism and Buddhist societies. They challenge the androcentric and patriarchal model of humanity, which objectifies women as non-humans, silences women, thus not even allowing them the freedom to share the suffering they experience within the existing oppressive

structures. A distinctive element in their argumentations is that they challenge the oppressive teachings in Buddhism that justify the control and the suffering of women. They also explore teachings of Buddhism where the dignity of women is affirmed and the equality of women and men is upheld. They firmly claim that this way of exploring the positive teachings about women in Buddhism might help women to overcome their suffering in society.

In Chapter five, the reflection on the findings of the fieldwork and the explorations of the Christian theological and Buddhist philosophical notions of suffering, will be confronted with the challenges that emerged and are emerging from the struggles of the Buddhist and Christian war-widows. More specifically, the three levels of Christian theological and Buddhist philosophical thinking on suffering studied in the previous chapters will be confronted with how the war-widows speak about their experience of suffering. The confrontation aims at discussing new theological challenges arising from the struggle of the Buddhist and Christian war-widows in SL.

This chapter contributes to achieving three objectives. Firstly, the reconstruction of how Buddhist and Christian war-widows voice their suffering based on their lived experience. The second objective is the comparison of the new elements emerging out of the fieldwork on suffering with the theories presented in chapters three and four with regard to suffering in Christian theological and Buddhist philosophical thinking. Taking into consideration the interpretation of suffering within Buddhist philosophical and Christian theological thought, the focus is the examination of how the main ideas and teachings of suffering in Buddhist and Christian thinking influence the war-widows and to study whether the widows move beyond the existing teachings and ideas of suffering discussed in chapters three and four. The third objective concerns a reflection on the challenging experience of war-widows as a source for reconstructing the existing theologies in SL. In order to achieve the objectives, this chapter will present the discussions under five sub-headings: (1) Theological challenges arising from the struggle of Christian war-widows; (2) Theological challenges arising from the struggle of Buddhist war-widows; (3) The self-definition of the Buddhist and Christian war-widows; (4) War-widows as 'Icons'; and (5) War-widows as an alternative magisterium for Christian theology in SL.

The reflection on the experience of war-widows in dealing with their suffering and marginalisation paves the way to seeing theology as emerging from the experience of those who are struggling to overcome their oppression and, moreover, as the place where God is to be found anew. The stories of war-widows illustrate that they made the connection between faith and action as a basis for theology, which has the potential to contribute to the existing theologies by challenging, rediscovering and renaming the truth that has been hidden for centuries. The explorations of the fieldwork, carried out with Buddhist and Christian war-widows belonging to both Sinhala and Tamil ethnic communities, revealed an alternative theological approach that recognises the experience of the war-widows who struggle for liberation as a major source of liberation. The fieldwork also broadens the experience of war-widows in an inter-religious context to the inter-ethnic, breaking the boundaries between the majority and the minority groups in the country. By doing so, war-widows have become pioneering voices of reconciliation in inter-religious and inter-ethnic spheres at the grassroots level in the post-war context in SL.

The war-widows redirect the power of the dominant forces that used to control them: they have begun to speak and to take decisions of their own. It is a journey from victimhood to agency and transformation, where the women become conscious of their own potential and the dignity of womanhood, breaking the boundaries of an 'established identity of womanhood/widowhood' amid SL's present yearning for reconciliation and lasting peace.

SAMENVATTING

BARRIÈRES DOORBREKEN

REFLECTIE OVER LIJDEN IN BOEDDHISME EN CHRISTENDOM IN DE PERSPECTIEVEN VAN OORLOGSWEDUWEN IN SRI LANKA

Als Sri Lankaanse vrouw, levend in een land dat zich in een overgangssituatie bevindt, een land dat zich aan het herstellen is van de wrede oorlog tussen de regering van Sri Lanka (GoSL) en de 'Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelaam' (LTTE), werd ik getroffen door de kwetsbaarheid van mensen die strijden voor zelfbeschikkingsrecht en vrijheid, en in het bijzonder door de strijd van oorlogsweduwen. Deze vrouwen vormen een gemarginaliseerde groep onder een bredere groep door de oorlog getroffenen, binnen de huidige onderdrukkende sociaal-politieke, religieuze en culturele structuren. De oorlogsweduwen vinden veel obstakels op hun pad, die zij moeten zien te overwinnen. Vaak is dat een gevaarlijke onderneming die zelfs kan uitmonden in een 'doodervaring'. Maar de vrouwen blijven strijden voor hun volwaardig mens-zijn door verzet te plegen als een nieuwe vorm van omgaan met marginalisering.

Door het samen leven met oorlogsweduwen die mij voortdurend inspireren door hun worsteling om vrijheid, dienden zich de volgende vragen aan: welke inzichten bieden deze weduwen mij voor mijn theologische reflectie als vrouw? Hoe worden zij gesteund door religies in hun pogingen om een einde te maken aan hun lijden of maken religies met en door hun gewoonten, rituelen en leer deze vrouwen juist tot slachtoffers? Is er een verband aan te wijzen tussen de maatschappelijke perceptie van weduwen en de leer van de religies in Sri Lanka? Hoe daagt de reflectie over de ervaringen van de vrouwen die zich verzetten tegen haar lijden de bestaande theologiën in Sri Lanka uit? Kunnen die theologiën als uitgangspunt gaan dienen voor deze vrouwen om vandaaruit hun waardigheid en vrijheid als vrouwen te bevorderen binnen de patriarchale Sri Lankaanse maatschappij die vrouwen discrimineert vanwege hun gender en ook hun etniciteit, klasse en sociale status?

Met deze vragen in het achterhoofd begon ik mijn onderzoek naar de manieren waarop de oorlogsweduwen met hun marginalisering omgaan, waarbij ik focuste op zowel boeddhistische oorlogsweduwen, die de meerderheid vormen, en christelijke oorlogsweduwen die behoren tot

de Singalese en Tamil gemeenschappen. Ik startte met de onderzoeksvraag: hoe nemen de boeddhistische en de christelijke oorlogsweduwen van Tamil en Singalese etniciteiten hun marginalisering waar en hoe gaan zij daarmee om, evenals met hun onderdrukking en lijden in relatie tot boeddhistische en christelijke ideeën over lijden?

In de zoektocht naar antwoorden op deze vraag exploreert deze studie de contextuele en theologische relevantie van de reflectie over de worsteling van boeddhistische en christelijke oorlogsweduwen voor de ontwikkeling van een theologie die hun verzet tegen de marginalisering en onderdrukking in de naoorlogse context in Sri Lanka verdisconteert. Dit onderzoek probeert ook te ontdekken hoe een dergelijke theologie de bestaande theologiën in Sri Lanka zou kunnen her-vormen en her-structureren door middel van de theologische uitdagingen en het nieuwe onderzoek die het resultaat zijn van de strijd, het verzet en de zelf definiëring van oorlogsweduwen.

Omdat een theologie ontstaat binnen een specifieke context, begint deze dissertatie met een hoofdstuk dat de Sri Lankaanse context schetst van waaruit het theologische onderzoek start. Omdat dit onderzoek zich richt op vrouwen die weduwe werden ten gevolge van de etnische oorlog tussen de GoSL en de LTTE, laat het eerste hoofdstuk zien dat de situatie van de oorlogsweduwen geen geïsoleerd fenomeen is, gezien het verband met het sociaal-politieke, religieuze en culturele systeem in dit land. Om die reden analyseert dit hoofdstuk (1) de achtergronden van de situatie van de weduwen: de sociale, religieuze, politieke en economische context, (2) de aanleidingen tot de etnisch-nationale oorlog die drie decennia duurde en veel vrouwen weduwe maakte, en (3) de culturele en religieuze factoren die bijdroegen aan de voortdurende marginalisering van oorlogsweduwen. Het onderzoek stelt langs deze weg vast dat de realiteit van oorlogsweduwen een resultaat is van sociale, religieuze, culturele, economische en politieke factoren die eeuwenlang de overhand hadden in Sri Lanka en dat derhalve de analyse van de marginalisering van de weduwen van dit land binnen dat raamwerk moet plaatsvinden.

Na de bespreking van deze context en de invloed van zowel de Singalese als de Tamil culturen op de levens van weduwen, worden de uitkomsten van mijn veldwerk geanalyseerd. Dit veldwerk werd uitgevoerd binnen een groep van Singalese en Tamil oorlogsweduwen

met de intentie om hun verzet tegen hun marginalisering in de huidige naoorlogse context te bestuderen. Dit veldwerk bracht het belangrijke maar niettemin onbekende terrein van ervaringen en ook de realiteit van oorlogsweduwen in kaart. Ondanks beperkingen en tekortkomingen werd het veldwerk op zo'n manier georganiseerd dat inzicht geboden wordt in de vijf voornaamste dimensies die de levens van de oorlogsweduwen ten zeerste aangaan: (1) factoren die vrouwen tot weduwen maakten en hun eerste reactie op dit gedwongen worden tot weduwschap, (2) de uitdagingen waarvoor de weduwen kwamen te staan na de dood van hun echtgenoten, (3) obstakels waarmee oorlogsweduwen te maken kregen in het maatschappelijk verkeer, (4) hun deelname aan en betrokkenheid bij maatschappelijke supportgroepen, en (5) de visie van oorlogsweduwen op religie en God/en.

Het veldwerk deed gedetailleerd onderzoek naar de zichtbare status van oorlogsweduwen in Sri Lanka, maar ook naar de verschillen tussen de ervaringen van een Singalese oorlogsweduwe en een Tamil oorlogsweduwe in een en dezelfde samenleving, alsook het verzet van oorlogsweduwen tegen de heersende religieuze, culturele, economische en politieke hegemonieën.

De responsen en reacties van de oorlogsweduwen tonen hoezeer zij in staat zijn tot het uitdagen van de heersende ideologieën van de sociale structuren die hen marginaliseren. De manieren waarop weduwen met hun marginalisering omgaan, leveren nieuwe ideeën en hypothesen op die het verdienen in overweging te worden genomen in de bestaande religieuze, culturele, economische en politieke sferen. Deze maken de weg vrij voor de geboorte van nieuwe ideologieën, zelfs theologiën die intrinsiek verbonden zijn met een context die weduwen begrijpt alsook hun rol in en bijdrage aan de maatschappij.

Omdat de oorlogsweduwen in hun zoektocht naar bevrijding vragen stellen bij sommige bestaande vormen van onderwijs, ideeën en verklaringen met betrekking tot lijden in hun religieuze gedachtegoed, wordt een reflectie over lijden in christelijke theologie en boeddhistische filosofie – die ik voor het veldwerk uitkoos als de religies van de oorlogsweduwen – gepresenteerd en bediscussieerd in de hoofdstukken 3 en 4. Deze twee hoofdstukken onderzoeken of religie functioneert als een ondersteunend element bij het overwinnen van marginalisering en onderdrukking van

de weduwen, of integendeel juist als een middel dat misbruikt wordt om weduwen te marginaliseren door middel van onderdrukkende leer, gewoonten en regels. De discussie over lijden is drieledig en bestaat uit (1) een beschrijving van het leergezag van de Rooms Katholieke Kerk en het Theravāda boeddhisme, (2) een kritische analyse van de ervaring van lijden vanuit het perspectief van katholieke bevrijdingstheologen en geëngageerde boeddhistische denkers, en (3) een kritische analyse van de ervaring van lijden vanuit het perspectief van feministisch theologes en feministisch boeddhistische denkers.

Hoofdstuk 3 bespreekt lijden binnen het christelijke theologische denken, met de nadruk op een theologische en contextuele analyse van het verzet van christelijke oorlogsweduwen tegen hun marginalisering op drie belangrijke niveaus. Het eerste deel van dit hoofdstuk onderzoekt de zes belangrijkste terreinen die samen de leer over het lijden van de Rooms Katholieke Kerk vormen waarin, (1) erfzonde en individuele zonde worden benadrukt en lijden als een mysterie wordt beschouwd, (2) lijden als verlossend wordt gezien, (3) er geen heil is zonder lijden, (4) lijden wordt verheerlijkt, (5) Jezus' lijden wordt benadrukt als Gods heilsplan, en (6) je kruis dragen om Jezus te volgen, wordt aangemoedigd. Van het allergrootste belang is het doel van het lijden: de verheerlijking van God door het lijden. Diverse christenen hebben deze leer echter geproblematiseerd, precies omdat deze is gebruikt om lijden te rechtvaardigen en om veel mensen in verschillende samenlevingen te ontmenselijken en te marginaliseren.

In het tweede deel wordt het verschil tussen theologisch abstractionisme en praxis gerichte theologie onderstreept binnen de reflectie van twee bevrijdingstheologen: Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino en de protestantse theoloog Jürgen Moltmann. Zij beargumenteren dat de traditionele leer van de kerk aangaande het lijden kortzichtig is en nieuw leven moet worden ingeblazen om op een verantwoorde manier over God te kunnen spreken in relatie met de strijd die mensen leveren. Deze theologen benadrukken de zwakte van die leer van de kerk over het lijden die lijden rechtvaardigt als verlossend. Zij onderstrepen juist sociale zondigheid – onrechtvaardige sociale structuren – in plaats van de individuele zondigheid van mensen. Om die reden en in plaats van hun bevrijdingstheologie te beperken tot meta-kosmische realiteiten, halen zij de bevrijding van de sociaal-politieke realiteit van de huidige wereld naar

voren. Hoewel deze theologen veel abstracte leerstellingen van de kerk aanvechten, introduceren zij ook de notie dat lijden onvermijdelijk is in het streven om tot een rechtvaardige maatschappij te komen.

Het derde deel van dit hoofdstuk onderzoekt daarom hoe drie feministisch theologen – Delores Williams, Rita Nakashima Brock en Nancy Pineda-Madrid – het lijden analyseren vanuit het perspectief van de onderdrukte (inclusief de armen), in het bijzonder vanuit het perspectief van 'arme' vrouwen die de meest kwetsbare groep vormen in veel maatschappijen en religies. Het belangrijkste aspect van hun theologie is dat zij vrouwen niet als slachtoffers beschouwen, maar juist als degenen die sociale, culturele, religieuze en politieke structuren aanvechten en zich ertegen verzetten. Vanuit het gegeven dat zij zelf geworteld zijn in verschillende sociale contexten van onderdrukking en geweld, argumenteren deze feministisch theologen dat lijden geen geïsoleerde realiteit is. Zij wijzen erop dat de bestaande sociale en religieuze structuren lijden rechtvaardigen en vrouwen aanmoedigen om dit te omarmen als 'natuurlijk'. Zij verwerpen iedere notie die lijden rechtvaardigt of verheerlijkt – om wat voor reden dan ook. Evenmin romantiseren zij de arme mensen zoals de twee bevrijdingstheologen dat enigszins doen in hun theologie. Het derde deel van dit hoofdstuk openbaart verder dat feministisch theologen, in tegenstelling tot de twee bevrijdingstheologen en de protestantse theoloog, lijden verbinden met hoop: hoop om lijden te overwinnen door de strijd van vrouwen.

In hoofdstuk 4 wordt de discussie voortgezet met de bestudering van lijden zoals dat wordt begrepen en gepresenteerd in het boeddhistisch filosofisch denken, het fundament van de basis leer in het boeddhisme. Het eerste deel van het hoofdstuk behandelt de leer van het Theravāda boeddhisme, en focust vooral op de realiteit van lijden in relatie tot de leer van het lijden (dukkha), vergankelijkheid (annica) en 'geen eeuwige ziel' (anattā). In deze leer wordt een centrale plaats ingenomen door de 'vier edele waarheden' die bevestigen dat er lijden is, wat de oorzaak van lijden is, het beëindigen van dukkha en de 'acht edele paden': de weg die naar de beëindiging van dukkha leidt.

Het tweede deel van dit hoofdstuk bestudeert de leer van de Boeddha om zo te kunnen bepalen wat de waarde ervan is niet alleen voor een persoonlijke bevrijding, maar ook voor de bevrijding van alle

mensen van lijden dat door onrechtvaardige structuren wordt gegenereerd. Drie geëngageerde boeddhistische denkers – Thich Nhat Hanh, Suylak Sivaraksa en Bernie Glassman – dagen de leer uit die een persoonlijk nirvāṇa centraal plaatst terwijl het lijden van de samenleving verwaarloosd wordt. In hun sociale analyse van lijden, identificeren zij verschillende oorzaken die lijden genereren. Zij belichten ook het belang van engagement met dit collectieve lijden, evenals het belang van de bevrijding van al degenen die lijden – een engagement dat behulpzaam zou kunnen zijn bij het bereiken van het ultieme doel van een boeddhist: nirvāṇa.

In de visie van de boeddhistische feministische denkers wordt de onderdrukking van vrouwen in de maatschappij gezien als een kwestie die net zo cruciaal is als andere sociale, politieke en economische kwesties die de geëngageerde boeddhistische denkers aan de orde stellen. Het derde deel van dit hoofdstuk bespreekt daarom dat en waarom de drie feministisch boeddhistische denkers, bhikkhuṇī Dhammanandā, bhikkhuṇī Karma Lekshe Tsomo en Rita Mary Gross, op krachtige wijze de rechtvaardiging van de gender onbalans in boeddhisme en boeddhistische samenlevingen tegenspreken. Zij bestrijden het androcentrische en patriarchale mensbeeld dat vrouwen objectiveert als 'niet mensen', vrouwen het zwijgen oplegt en hen dus zelfs niet de vrijheid laat om het lijden te delen dat zij ervaren binnen de bestaande onderdrukkende structuren. Een opvallend element in hun argumentatie is dat zij de boeddhistische onderdrukkende leer bestrijden die de controle over en het lijden van vrouwen rechtvaardigt. Zij onderzoeken overigens ook de boeddhistische leer die de waardigheid van vrouwen bevestigt en waar de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen wel geldt. Zij claimen met kracht dat deze manier van onderzoek naar de positieve leer aangaande vrouwen in het boeddhisme, vrouwen kan helpen om hun lijden in de maatschappij te overwinnen.

In hoofdstuk 5 worden de reflectie over de resultaten van het veldwerk en de analyses van de christelijke theologische en boeddhistische filosofische ideeën over lijden geconfronteerd met de uitdagingen die het resultaat waren en zijn van de strijd van de boeddhistische en christelijke oorlogsweduwen. Meer specifiek betreft het de confrontatie van de drie niveaus van het christelijk theologische en boeddhistisch filosofische denken over lijden met de wijze waarop de oorlogsweduwen over hun ervaringen van lijden spreken. De confrontatie richt zich op een bespreking van de

nieuwe theologische uitdagingen die uit de strijd van de boeddhistische en christelijke oorlogsweduwen in Sri Lanka naar voren komen.

Dit hoofdstuk draagt bij aan het verwezenlijken van drie doeleinden. Ten eerste, de reconstructie van hoe boeddhistische en christelijke oorlogsweduwen stem geven aan hun lijden, gebaseerd op geleefde ervaringen. Het tweede doel is een vergelijking bieden van de nieuwe elementen die voortkomen uit het veldwerk over lijden, met de theorieën die in de hoofdstukken 3 en 4 zijn gepresenteerd met betrekking tot lijden in het christelijk theologische en boeddhistisch filosofische denken. Met inachtneming van de interpretatie van lijden in boeddhistisch filosofische en christelijk theologisch gedachtegoed, is de focus een analyse van hoe de belangrijkste ideeën en de leer aangaande lijden in boeddhistisch en christelijk denken de oorlogsweduwen beïnvloeden en of de weduwen de bestaande leer en ideeën over lijden die in de hoofdstukken 3 en 4 zijn besproken, achter zich laten. Het derde doel betreft een reflectie over de ervaring van oorlogsweduwen als een bron voor de reconstructie van bestaande theologiën in Sri Lanka. Om deze doelen te bereiken presenteert dit hoofdstuk de besprekingen onder 5 sub kopjes: (1) Theologische uitdagingen die voortkomen uit de strijd van christelijke oorlogsweduwen, (2) Theologische uitdagingen die voortkomen uit de strijd van boeddhistische oorlogsweduwen, (3) De zelf definiëring van de boeddhistische en de christelijke oorlogsweduwen, (4) Oorlogsweduwen als 'Ikonen', en (5) Oorlogsweduwen als een alternatief magisterium [leergezag] voor christelijke theologie in Sri Lanka.

De reflectie over de ervaringen van oorlogsweduwen met het omgaan met hun lijden en marginalisering, bereidt de weg voor om theologie te zien als voortkomend uit de ervaringen van degenen die worstelen om hun onderdrukking te overwinnen, en bovendien als de plaats waar God weer te vinden is. De verhalen van oorlogsweduwen illustreren dat zij het verband leggen tussen geloof en handelen als basis voor theologie. Dit heeft het potentieel om bij te dragen aan de bestaande theologiën door uitdaging, herontdekking en de waarheid, die eeuwenlang verborgen waren, opnieuw te benoemen. De onderzoeken van het veldwerk, dat werd uitgevoerd met boeddhistische en christelijke oorlogsweduwen die zowel behoren tot de Singalese als de Tamil etnische gemeenschappen, liet een alternatieve theologische benadering zien die de ervaringen van de oorlogsweduwen

die strijden voor vrijheid (h)erkent als een voorname bron van bevrijding. Het veldwerk verbreedt bovendien de ervaringen van oorlogsweduwen in een inter-religieuze context naar inter-etniciteit, zodoende de grenzen doorbrekend tussen de meerderheids- en de minderheidsgroeperingen in het land.

Op die manier zijn oorlogsweduwen pioniers- stemmen van verzoening geworden op het inter-religieuze en inter-ethnische vlak aan de basis in het naoorlogse Sri Lanka.

De oorlogsweduwen buigen de macht om van de dominante krachten die hen beheersten: zij zijn gaan spreken en begonnen met zelf beslissingen te nemen. Dit is een reis van slachtofferschap naar handelend vermogen en transformatie, waar de vrouwen zich bewust worden van hun eigen potentieel en de waardigheid van het vrouw-zijn, de grenzen doorbrekend van een 'gevestigde identiteit van vrouwschap/weduwschap' te midden van Sri Lanka's huidige verlangen naar verzoening en blijvende vrede.

vertaling uit het Engels door Magda Misset-van de Weg.

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